



ERRATA.

Page 30, line 14, for "I have found thee" read "I found thee."

" 58, " 17, for "abysm" read "abyme."

" 70, " 8, for "unveil" read "enveil."

" 95, " 25, for "throw" read "throws."

" 124, " 6, for "knew" read "knows."

" 126, " 6, for "gale" read "breeze."

" 132, " 13, for "try" read "vie."

" 166, " 15, for "declare" read "unfold."

" 168, " 2, for "find" read "know."

" 177, " 7, for "kindly" read "knightly."

" 178, " 6, for "heart" read "breast."

" 181, " 21, for "breast" read "breath."

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Vahnfried

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London

Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd.

1902

36302

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CANTO I

THE FOREST



VAHNFRIED

CANTO I

THE FOREST

WHAT time the good King Arthur held his court
Enthroned amid Caerleon's lofty towers,
When in the tournament, in friendly sport,
The Table Round displayed their knightly powers,
Or filled with song and mirth their ladies' bowers,
Whose sunny smiles their peaceful moments blest,
Or feasting whiled away the happy hours,
Till on some sudden summons, lance in rest,
They sallied forth on some adventurous quest,

There lived two brothers ; one, Sir Eglantine,
A knight of Arthur's famous Table Round,
Had left his castle with the bold design
To seek in Fairyland, whose realms abound
With strange encounters, such as might be found
Worthy the prowess of a valiant knight,
Whom Uther's royal son had firmly bound
'Gainst evil-doers to oppose his might
And boldly venture to maintain the right.

Vahnfried

Five years had passed and yet no tidings came ;
Nought of the brave Sir Eglantine was heard.
His younger brother, Adimo by name,
Filled with disquiet bred by hope deferred,
Partly by chivalrous ambition stirred,
Though still a youth nor of an age to bear
Weapons of warfare, could not be deterred,
And left in secrecy his home, to share
The quest the good King Arthur made his care.

Six knights departed into Fairyland
Bound on this quest, but yet young Adimo
Went forth alone, no weapon in his hand,
~~Too proud as squire to any knight to go.~~
As yet his untamed pride disdained to know
A master in the mightiest of the throng
Of noble knights, nor did his bosom glow
To earn the honours that to knights belong ;
His heart was more attuned to minstrel's song.

But Adimo had not the power of song,
Although his mind o'erflowed with noble thought,
And ever as he roamed the woods among,
His heart the melodies of Nature caught,
And stored them with a rapturous sense that brought
A flush of pleasure to his face, and sent
A thrill throughout his frame, but though he sought
To echo them, his voice could ne'er present
His song in words that could his ear content.

And thus he journeyed into Fairyland
With lightsome heart upon his lonesome way ;
Longing to see its lovely paths expand,
He onward pressed until it chanced one day
He saw a beldame, withered, old and grey,
Draw forth from out its cage a singing bird
Meaning to kill it, but he bade her stay.
The toothless hag his haughty bidding heard
And mumblingly replied, by anger stirred,

“How now, my master ! what is that to thee?
What ails it that I may not treat mine own
In such wise as I list? It seems to me
Thou art no knight that journeyeth alone
Without a following, ere thy beard be grown.
I'm weary of the singing of this thrush.
There seems a strain of sadness in its tone,
As if imprisonment its heart would crush,
Nor will it cease although I bid it hush.”

“Is this,” cried Adimo, “your sole complaint?
And would you thus commit a grievous wrong
Because a captive bird, for freedom faint,
Betrays some signs of sorrow in its song?
The impassioned wellings from its heart that throng
Are not like joyous carols learned by rote.
Joy in this world is fleeting, sorrow strong,
And sadness lurks within the sweetest note
That falls melodious from the songster's throat.”

The beldame, fury burning in her breast,
Ceased not the interfering youth to scold,
Nor would at first consent, though strongly pressed,
The longed-for vengeance to exchange for gold.
Yielding at last, the hated bird was sold.
The lust for gold prevailed ; the price was high,
Exhausting all his slender purse did hold.
"Better by far," cried Adimo, "that I
Should face privation than this bird should die."

So with a cheerful heart young Adimo
Released the captive, but the bird would stay
Hovering around him as he turned to go,
And as he journeyed onward showed the way,
Whiling the moments with his tuneful lay,
Or coming ever and anon for rest,
Like some young urchin wearied of his play,
To Adimo, and, nestled at his breast,
In song his love and gratitude expressed.

They journeyed not upon the beaten track ;
No money now had Adimo to pay
For hospitality, but turning back
He would not think of. Travelling by day,
At night upon the mossy sward he lay.
The glow-worms were his lanterns, and his food
The nuts and berries gathered on the way ;
The sparkling rills his flagons. Though but rude
And scant his fare, it could not change his mood.

And as they wandered many days, it seemed
 To Adimo, as ever and again
 The songster warbled, that as one who dreamed,
 He seemed to catch the meaning of the strain,
 And woke the hills, re-echoing it again,
 And when he heard his voice, so clear and strong,
 He felt his journey had not been in vain.
 Forth from his heart welled strains pent up too long ;
 His voice at last had found the power of song.

One morning, waking early, they approached
 A verdant forest, whose primeval shade,
 Throwing gigantic shadows, far encroached
 Upon the verdure of the neighbouring glade.
 Within was silence ; not a leaf displayed
 The slightest motion, not a branch was stirred ;
 An air of mystery seemed to pervade
 The forest ; here was uttered by the bird
 The saddest song that Adimo had heard.

“The gate of Fairyland ! Ah, sweet indeed
 It were forever to remain with thee,
 But destiny forbidding hath decreed
 That thou, O Adimo, alone must be
 To dree thy weird, till happily thou art free
 Outside the gate that at the far end lies,
 For no return through this the Fates decree.
 Dangers abound ; no warning voice despise ;
 When met, meet bravely ; lost is he who flies.

"The Oak and Elm are strong and true indeed ;
The Beech, a loving heart, may trusted be ;
The Ash, with his insatiable greed,
Is one most surely to be shunned by thee ;
The falsest of them all, the Alder tree ;
Beware the enchantment of her magic spell.
When thou shalt tokens of her presence see,
Be on thy guard. I may no further tell.
Seek yonder hermit's hut. Farewell ! Farewell !"

The bird departed ; Adimo alone
Was left his tedious travels to pursue,
Mourning his lost companion. He had grown
To love the songster ; in his breast he knew
The need of love, that, loyal, strong and true,
Gladdens the heart on which its light is thrown,
Dispelling darkness with its roseate hue.
All who would happy be its power must own,
From humble hind to monarch on his throne.

So, as he sorrowing journeys on, hard by
Within the confines of the wood he sees
A column of grey smoke, that, curling high,
Rises above the summit of the trees,
Unswayed or undisturbed by air or breeze,
In bold relief against a cloudless sky,
Such as is seen in equatorial seas,
That speaks of human habitations nigh ;
And soon a lowly cabin meets his eye.

The Forest

7

Yet strangely was it fashioned ; it had been
Built of rough logs, and rudely thatched with straw,
But cruciform in shape, and branches green
Traced on its gates the sign of Christian law.
And Adimo, astounded when he saw,
Fell on his knees before the sacred sign
That filled his heart with reverence and awe,
For well he knew and loved its form divine,
Deeming this was indeed some holy shrine.

Just then the eremite came forth to greet
And bid him welcome to his humble place ;
Him Adimo, arising on his feet,
Saluted with such reverence and grace
That charmed the hermit, while his youthful face
Filled him with wonderment that one was come
Alone to Fairyland—whose noble race
His face and figure shewed—far from his home,
Not yet a knight on venturous quests to roam.

Young Adimo, his salutations made,
Desired to journey farther on his way,
But his farewell the holy man delayed,
With friendly words and counsels bade him stay,
Saying, " My son, thou should'st not tread by day
The lonely forest-paths, for dangers lurk ;
At night-time, wakeful, greedy for their prey,
Tempters abound ; who would temptations shirk,
Must guard at night against their evil work.

"Rest, therefore, till the eventide descends ;
Then, strengthened by the faith that you profess,
Go forth to cope with evil till the ends
That bring you here are gained. May happiness
Be yours. I pray that well-deserved success
May crown your wanderings, and that love of right
Your conflicts with the evil ones may bless.
Who treads these dangerous paths must bravely fight
To keep his soul from tarnish clear and bright."

Adimo yielded and till even stayed
And gratefully partook the hermit's fare ;
Sinking to rest upon a pallet made
Of twigs, he slept as one without a care
Or troubled thought his peaceful dreams to share.
Waking, he sees the sun's declining rays
Filling the chamber with a ruddy glare ;
And marks the hermit, rapt as in a maze,
Fixing upon the wall his steady gaze.

The shadow of a hand—and that was all,
No head or body but a giant hand ;
'Twas this the hermit gazed at on the wall,
And Adimo, as he the shadow scanned,
Shuddered as they who for the first time stand
About to plunge into some bloody fray.
He watched the fingers closing and expand,
Now here, now there, in an impatient way,
Eager to grasp some long-expected prey.

"That shadowy hand," the holy hermit said,
"Is of the Ash, to travellers a foe,
That even Arthur's valiant knights may dread.
He lurks within the forest ; dire the woe
That those who meet him unbefriended know.

His greedy hands this evening seem to grasp
Some prey predoomed—be warned, O Adimo !
His hands are gnarled, and rugged as a rasp
And none escape who feel their deadly clasp.

"I roam by day the forest while he sleeps ;
My cell at night no evil can assail.
Triumphant o'er each evil form that creeps,
I see the shadow of the Cross prevail.
Before that sign the sinful spectres quail,
Nor dare to venture 'neath the holy rood.
My trust is in it and it cannot fail.
The sacred emblem stills their voices rude,
And back reluctant fall the savage brood.

"For in this forest mystic forms are rife ;
That hollow, stunted and misshapen tree
We call the Ash enjoys a double life ;
Though all unchang'd now it seems to be,
The trunk remaineth, but its tenant free
Hath, even as we watched the shadow, gone
To roam the woods, a thing of mystery,
A vision terrible—the sight alone
Might change the unwary traveller's heart to stone.

He bade the parting wanderer Godspeed ;
And Adimo, now cautioned twice to shun
The Ash, determined in his mind to heed
The kindly warning—started, for the sun
Had sunk from sight ; the night of life begun,
The forest was awake ; each leafy-nest
Poured forth its stream of sprites intent on fun.
The Ash, the holy hermit told his guest,
Was journeying east ; his path lay to the west.

So with a lightsome heart he went. The night,
Illumined by the moon, seemed bright as day ;
The flowers, resplendent in the mystic light
That seeming loved upon their leaves to play,
Gladdened his heart with colours bright and gay ;
And ever and again, along the dells,
When the soft, soothing winds their flowerets sway,
In mellow cadence, sweetly sounding, swells
The music of the hyacinthine bells.

As when returning homeward o'er the seas
From some long voyage, at the hour of prime,
From some cathedral borne upon the breeze
The homesick sailor hears the well-known chime,
His pulse and heart in unison beat time
To the soft strains that murmur "Home is near,"
His soul goes forth to meet the strains sublime,
So fall those fairy bells upon the ear,
The wanderer's heart and lonely way to cheer.

And through the forest flit the fiery flies,
Blue, red and orange, hovering here and there,
Or sudden, seeming meteor-like to rise
Like rockets rushing swiftly through the air,
Tinging the verdant frondage with their glare,
Like living lanterns scattered all around ;
While every blade of herbage seems to bear
The glowing worms that myriad-like abound,
And stud like tiny stars the moss-clad ground.

For times there are in every life, I wot,
When night more beautiful than daytime seems.
How swift they vanish, yet not all forgot
I seem to live those times again in dreams.
And sometimes wakeful, when the moonlight streams
Through open casement on my chamber floor,
My wearied mind with recollection teems,
Fancy recalls the halcyon days of yore—
Those golden hours return to me once more.

Sweet is the Fairyland in which we brood
In fancy on the unforgotten love
That made earth fair for us ; the saddened mood
That mourns its memory makes it sweeter prove.
Ah ! why should dreams so sweet our spirits move
Like blossoms blooming only for a day,
And turn our thoughts from the ambitious groove
In which we thought to bear the palm away,
Our high hopes buried with the lifeless clay.

The lifeless clay, but beautiful in death,
The loving spirit still abides with me ;
Abides with me, although her parting breath
Gained her a holier love than mine could be,
Yet must I murmur not at Heaven's decree ;
For ever with me now my spirit feels

The presence earthly eye can never see,
Till, rent this mortal curtain, Death reveals
The Happiness that Heaven itself conceals.

So wandering onward as the stars arise, 1
Studding like glittering gems the veil of night,
They seem to Adimo like angels' eyes
Peering from heaven to earth with glances bright.
Through the dense forest streaming seen, their
light
More beautiful appeared than when their rays
On open plains unhindered glad our sight.
He sings to while his way some simple lays
He heard his mother sing in earlier days.

"The night is clear, the stars appear
In glittering lines of light,
And earth and sky seem yet more nigh,
When half revealed by night,
Than when the sun from heaven shone
And all around was bright.

"The stars shine bright with radiant light ;
We greet them with our eyes,
But yet the mind they cannot bind
For fancy farther flies.
Do what we will we cannot still
The memories that arise.

"With mind distressed and sighs suppressed
I give my thoughts the rein.
Ah ! then it seems, like fleeting dreams
The loved ones come again,
But like a shade, those visions fade,
And leave my heart in pain.

"With heart subdued and grief renewed,
In vain I call on high ;
Those voices sweet can ne'er repeat
An answer to my cry ;
They pass no more o'er Death's dark shore
To greet my longing eye.

"And I alone must linger on,
In solitude must stay
To drag my chains, till heavenly strains
Shall call my soul away
To wing its flight from earthly night
To everlasting day."

Thus singing merrily he onward sped,
All fear and sorrow spurned, for many hours,
But by degrees an undefined dread—
A nameless fear—his bosom overpowers ;
A chill comes o'er him sudden as the showers
That burst in summer from a cloudless sky,
And in his heart he deems some danger lowers,
Feeling a consciousness of peril nigh ;
He knows not what it is he fears or why.

As one enwrapped by some mysterious awe,
His reason by some restless horror bound,
He gazed about him, but no peril saw ;
Listened intently, but he heard no sound
That spoke of danger in the woods around.
Then vainly strives to free himself from fears
For which his fluttered senses know no ground ;
The terror still tenaciously adheres
And stops to Reason's voice the mental ears.

And as he turns his gaze toward the moon,
He sees a wreath of sable clouds arise,
Sweeping to meet her in her course, and soon
They close and hide her from his troubled eyes.
Anxious he waits until the darkness flies,
And brightness once again resumes its sway.
Dreading no longer danger from the skies,
With lightened heart he turns his glance away
To where across his path a shadow lay.

The shadowy hand on which the hermit gazed
The gnarled and knotted finger-joints proclaim,
And Adimo, regarding it amazed,
Marvelling no other portion of the frame
Was there revealed, with courage urged by shame,
Determined the corporeal form to view ;
And eager as a hunter seeking game,
His anxious gaze to every quarter threw,
Striving to pierce the thickest forest through.

But all in vain he seeks ; no danger there,
Nor Ash nor evil spirit meets his eye,
But still resolved the worst to know and bear,
Throws himself prone upon the sward hard by,
Stretching his limbs so that his head should lie
Within the hollow of the hand, and soon
A vision terrible his looks descry—
An awful shape between him and the moon—
And horror-stunned he sinketh down a-swoon.

How long he lay there until consciousness
Returned to him again he could not tell,
But with returning sight, to his distress,
Upon a spectral form his vision fell,
That, as the moon shone through it, seemed to swell;
While the contortions of its corpse-like face
Were like some angel's hurled from Heaven to Hell,
Dizzy with falling—hatred and despair
And pain commingling in its horrid glare.

And high above its head the hideous hand,
Unlike the form, opaque and well-defined
Against the sky, he marked the joints expand.
The fingers twitched as though they longed to wind
Themselves around their prey, and in his mind
Adimo feels himself the destined prize,
And from despair fresh courage seems to find ;
Then closing on the horrid sight his eyes,
Leaps to his feet, and through the forest flies.

Blindly he rushes on with headlong speed,
And, terror urging him his powers to strain,
Stays not his steps his path to pick or heed,
Lest on his slackened speed the spectre gain.
On wings of terror borne, but all in vain,
For ill-directed haste begets delay,
He stumbles on a root and falls again,
And for a moment, as he prostrate lay,
The spectre stooped to grasp the longed-for prey.

And now had Adimo ignobly died,
Nor further had his life adorned my tale,
But the old adage none but fools deride,
"Succour may come, though Hope-exhausted fail,"
Once more proved true, for through the moonlight
pale

A woman's figure swiftly darts between
The spectre and his prey, nor did she quail
Before the ghastly shape, but, like a queen,
Urges him backward with imperious mien.

"Go hence, thou stunted and misshapen thing !
 Is not the hollow in thy rotten heart
 Filled with thy victims ? Shall their death-cries ring
 Forever on my ears ? But no ; my art
 Foretells thy speedy doom. I see thee start.
 Thy greed insatiable hath made thee rash,
 But vengeance presses ; trunk from root shall part,
 Totter, and prostrate fall, with mighty crash,
 When some avenging arm shall smite the Ash."

She ceased; and Adimo, as in a dream,
 Beholds the ghastly figure fade from sight,
 And feels himself caught up by arms that seem
 To hold him tenderly, and glances bright,
 From gentle eyelids flashing, seem to light
 His inmost soul, and still its wild alarms ;
 Something recalls the past, and past delight,
 Speaks of the mother who, with loving charms,
 Subdued his grief, and clasped him in her arms.

Roused from his dreams, he sees a lovely face,
 Such as a Pheidias had loved to mould,
 So calm and full of love, where one might trace
 The lessons of past years, but not behold
 Footprints of Time ; and to her ankles rolled
 Her waving tresses, dark, but tinged with green,
 With here and there a tiny fleck of gold,
 That in the moonlight shone with silken sheen,
 Like that at night on glossy foliage seen.

And mingled with the sighing of the breeze
He hears her singing like some far-off sound,
Although so near, and visions of the trees
That stood in stately avenues around
His childhood's home—and scattered on the ground
Beneath, the beechnuts that he loved so well—
Sweep o'er his mind, and then the strains abound
With hours of idleness in woody dell,
Or energetic chase o'er moor and fell.

But with the lulling breezes, hushed the song.
Then a soft whisper falls upon his ear,
"Dread not the Ash ; although his power be strong,
He shall not harm my songster ; have no fear,
I can protect you from all dangers here ;
But you must wander on. Oh, would that I
Could keep my love my lonely life to cheer.
Yet may I use what power I have, to try
To save you when the hideous Ash is nigh.

"Thus shall I guard you," and, with saucy air,
She shakes her flowing locks before his eyes ;
"Now, sever speedily this tress of hair."
"I cannot spoil it," Adimo replies.
"Tush, foolish boy !" the laughing maiden cries ;
"Soon will it grow again as fair and fine."
But as he severs it, the maiden sighs,
Then gently murmurs, "Now, our fates entwine,
For love and pain endured have made thee mine."

Around his waist she ties the shining tress,
 And as she fastens it, the morning breaks,
 And Adimo, o'ercome by weariness,
 Sinks into peaceful sleep, and only wakes
 When the sun sets at evening ; then he makes
 A frugal meal of beechnuts, for he lay
 Beneath a beech-tree ; and arising, takes
 His journey westward, deeming, since the day
 Is ended, he must travel on his way.

Again he treads the forest's fern-clad lanes,
 And, nothing breaking on his solitude,
 His heart once more its hardihood regains.
 The all-pervading silence suits his mood,
 For much he loves upon his thoughts to brood.
 Anguish had scarce upon his bosom pressed,
 Or seared his heart with finger harsh and rude.
 Sorrows of manhood had not yet suppressed
 Youth's fond imaginings that life was blessed.

Ah, would it were ! the heart is like a lute
 From which resounds a calm melodious strain,
 Till Anguish, bidding peaceful sounds be mute,
 Stretches the strings to wake the notes of pain
 (That Harmony may cease and Discord reign),
 Tighter and tighter, till the strings at last,
 Worn by the ceaseless tension, snap in twain.
 An empty frame remaineth, holding fast
 The bitter memory of a wasted past.

But Pride forbids that Manhood should reveal,
When gnawing cares assail on every side,
The agony it cannot all cōnceal,
But, like the Spartan boy, its sufferings hide
From friend and foe alike ; accursed pride
That guards its secret suffering jealously,
Pressing it to its heart, a cursed bride,
Doomed to beget a hideous progeny
Of agony, remorse, and misery.

There is a pain in dwelling on the past.
My present life is as a dream to me.
Of calm monotony, too still to last.
Therefore I seek, in days as yet to be,
For themes to set my weary memories free,
And some ambition to my heart I press,
Yet dreading, as in bygone years, to see,
When ripened to fulfilment by success,
Its fruit the Dead-Sea fruit of bitterness.

But Adimo was happy, for no care
As yet upon his mind had left a trace,
Nor trouble vexed ; for him the day was fair
And in his thoughts the morrow had no place ;
But with his fancies dwelling on the grace
Of the Beech-maiden and the songs she sang,
As lovingly she seemed to scan his face,
A vein of sadness filled the song that sprang
Forth from his heart and through the forest rang.

" Stay, fleeting hours ; the summer nights are fair.

Why all unheeding wing thy rapid flight ?

Sweet is the river ; let us linger there.

" Filled is my heart with pleasure and delight,

Oh, let us thus a little while remain,

Nor end our pleasure with approaching night.

" Fly, then ; since prayers for present grace are vain,

That with the morrow we may meet again.

" Stay, fleeting hours ! Though long the winter's
night,

Yet all too short when parting comes with day—

Parting that robs my mind of all delight.

" Better that I should wander far away—

I and my love, whose presence gives her pain—

Yet now I deem she grieves I will not stay.

" Yet must my love all words of love restrain,

But shall it be so when we meet again ?

" Spring, where wast thou ? How couldst thou
suffer death,

When the long winter months were well nigh sped,

To touch the lily with his blighting breath ?

"Sleep, loved one, sleep ! within thine earthly bed,
Lulled by the murmuring river's plaintive strain.
Fair are the trees that wave above thy head.

"No more the dripping oars the tide distract
To speed our boat ; we shall not meet again."

Scarce had the latest notes in silence died
Among the trees, when by the moon's pale light,
Riding towards him, Adimo descried,
With slow and saddened mien, a mail-clad knight,
Dejected and distressed, a sorry sight,
As one unhorsed and conquered in the fray,
Ashamed that other eyes should see his plight.
Shorn was his helm of crest and colours gay,
And thick the red rust on his armour lay.

And yet, withal, so noble seemed his face,
Though sorrow's hand upon his brow had strown
The lines of sadness ; and the manly grace,
The weight so lightly on the saddle thrown,
Bespoke a knight whom Adimo had known
Among the knights in Arthur's royal hall,
Famed for his skill in arms so often shown.
Stainless and fearless were they wont to call
The gentlest and the bravest of them all.

So, marvelling to see in such a guise
A knight so famous for his matchless skill,

And one accustomed from his youth to prize
 The peerless purity that knows no ill,
 And in his heart all evil thoughts to still—
 Faith, love, and courtesy, from day to day,
 His actions ruled, the prompters of his will—
 Adimo runs to meet him on his way,
 With friendly words his journey to delay.

“Sir Percival ! but oh, how sad a change !
 Is this the joyous knight who left the Vale
 Of Camelot, with bounding heart to range
 The wide world seeking for the Holy Grail
 Hidden from mortal sight by mystic veil—
 Seen by the pure in heart in heavenly trance—
 What hast befallen thee ? And why so pale,
 Crestless, with tarnished arms ? What dire mis-
 chance
 Hath robbed the laurels from thy venturous lance ?”

“Alas ! O Adimo !” the knight replied,
 “No foeman’s lance hath stretched me in the dust.
 My vaunted purity, by tempters tried,
 Proved frail, and undeserving of all trust,
 Falling an easy prey to earthly lust.
 Long time I lingered captive to the powers—
 Of an enchantress, while decay and rust
 Gathered about my arms, as in her bowers,
 Duty forgot, I dreamed of love and flowers.

"How I escaped it matters not to tell ;
No need to dwell upon my hapless tale.
Suffice it that I found her heart a hell ;
Her barren love was profitless and stale.
Alas ! no longer can the Holy Grail
The guiding star of my existence be.
No sinful hand may draw aside the veil ;
None but with stainless soul can hope to see
Or penetrate the sacred mystery.

"And now, with armour tarnished like my soul,
A longing for atonement rules my life ;
No hand shall cleanse my armour till the whole
Is burnished by the blows received in strife.
Henceforth in Fairyland, with conflicts rife,
To linger ever shall be my delight.
If thou thy heart would shield from sorrow's knife,
Beware the Alder Maiden, lest the plight
Befall the singer that befel the knight."

They parted, each continuing on his way,
Adimo musing as he passed the wood,
Wondering that Percival had gone astray,
Having temptations from his youth withstood,
Spurning the evil, clinging to the good ;
And yet the saint who hath not sinned before
May fail to pick his pathway as he should.
But one unguarded step on life's dark shore
And then we fall--perchance to rise no more.

How easily in this world things go wrong.

We stay one moment but to count the cost,
And that one moment proves, alas ! too long ;

Too late the opportunity is lost.

The cherished object that we treasure most,
Touched in a heedless moment, snaps in twain.

The flower we love the best an early frost
May blight, and vanished joys give place to pain,
And life is nevermore the same again.

Like vessels launched upon the sea of Time,
Some lives through ill-directed steering fail ;

Many are wrecked upon the rocks of crime,
And others drift, when hurricanes prevail,
Helpless and rudderless, before the gale
To founder, swamped beneath a watery wall.

Some strike their flag when hostile sins assail ;
Others through heedless inanition fall
The helpless victims of a sudden squall.

Musing on Percivál's unhappy fate

Adimo through the tedious forest hies,
And, wearied with his travelling, feels elate,
When in the east he sees the sun arise,
And night's dark cheek with crimson blushes dyes,
As she aside her heavy mantle throws,
And swiftly from the dawn's embraces flies,
He longs his heavy eyes in sleep to close
And soothe his languid frame with calm repose.

Beside his path he saw a sheltered nook,
Where overhanging rocks, with moss o'erspread,
Shaded the margin of a babbling brook
That, winding onward like a silver thread,
With rippling song across the forest sped ;
While all around are heavy-laden trees,
Bowed down with fruits of purple, gold and red ;
A scene which Adimo enchanted sees,
And hastes his yearning hunger to appease.

For man is mortal, and his frame desires
The sustenance the spirit needeth not,
And craving Nature's stern decree requires
Joy, grief, and beauty be alike forgot.
The loveliest landscape and its fairest spot
Attempt in vain the wearied gaze to keep ;
And so, recumbent in the verdant grot,
Adimo's wearied brain is wooed by sleep,
And soon is wrapt in slumbers still and deep.

Throughout the day he slept, for nothing broke
His peaceful resting ; no disturbing dream
Harassed his slumbers ; and refreshed he woke
Just as the setting sungod's latest gleam
Lingered awhile upon the running stream
That crimsoned at his kiss, then from her breast
Tore himself slowly with reluctant beam,
And veiled in stately solitude his crest
Behind the cloud-wreaths of the empurpled West.

Then Adimo arising gazed around,
 Scanning his chamber from the verdant floor
 To the stone canopy, and wondering found
 The rocks that formed the grotto covered o'er
 With wondrous carvings, all unmarked before,
 Where every figure by the sunset shown
 A semblance of arrested motion bore,
 As though the lamp of life had swiftly flown,
 And changed the living form to lifeless stone.

Carved on this panel, Orpheus seems to play
 His lyre entrancing, while the trees around
 Their lofty tops and leafy branches sway,
 Wakened to motion by the wondrous sound ;
 On this, Pygmalion, his long labours crowned,
 His love of art rewarded, gazing stands
 At Galatea stepping to the ground ;
 While all around are scenes from distant lands,
 Seemingly sculptured by some god-like hands.

And Adimo, enraptured at the sight,
 From such a paradise is loath to part ;
 Heedless of how the moments wing their flight,
 His soul bows down before the shrine of art ;
 Love of the beautiful pervades his heart.
 But for a moment casting down his eyes,
 He wakens from his dreams with sudden start,
 Then, swiftly kneeling, scans in mute surprise
 A mossy boulder that before him lies.

What was it there he saw? A hand and arm,
Seemingly covered by a film of stone
Like alabaster. Had some mystic charm
Around some female form this mantle thrown,
Or did the glassy crust, by moss o'ergrown,
The very genius of true art conceal
From curious gazing, save of those alone
Whose hearts her all-pervading beauty feel,
And to their eyes her wondrous power reveal?

So from the boulder tearing moss away,
He views in wonderment two tiny feet,
And, when the mantle's hem his toils display,
He feels his heart with joy and rapture beat,
And hastes his self-set labour to complete.
A woman's figure, wondrous in its grace,
Little by little, makes his labour sweet,
Till, all the moss removed, his eye can trace,
Surpassing all in loveliness, her face.

She seemed so beautiful, as though the breath
Escaped her parted lips, and through her veins
The warm blood ran, he could not deem that death,
Or frigid marble, held her soul in chains.
Thoughts of Pygmalion his mind retains,
And Orpheus, who, as ancient poets tell,
Moved crag and mountain with his wondrous strains.
So, deeming that the sound could pierce her cell,
He wakens with his song the wooded dell.

"Lady of love and of beauty,
The world in its darkness and sorrow,
Awaiting the brighter to-morrow,
Is longing and sighing for thee ;
For Art in its mystical sweetness
Is lacking but thee for completeness,
Then come in thy beauty's repleteness,
Its mistress to be.

"Awake with the lessons of ages,
The manifold fruits of thy dreaming,
Thy mind with the memories teeming
Of wondrous and beautiful things ;
With eyes filled with marvellous fire
To kindle the poet's desire,
Illumine his soul, and inspire
The songs that he sings.

"The stars of the heaven shall crown thee,
Thy mantle shall be of the sunlight,
And sun, moon, and planets the one light
That pierces our darkness shall see,
And mountain and valley and river,
And flowers with dewdrops a-quiver,
Yea, all things shall haste to deliver
Their homage to thee."

Ceasing a while to gaze upon her face,
And so inspired new efforts to command,

He fondly fancies from its former place
A little way had moved her shapely hand.
Her form so wonderfully fair he scanned,
Imagining with breathings faint and slight
He saw her bosom heaving and expand,
But deeming that he had not seen aright,
With quivering pulse, his song resumed its flight.

"Queen of my heart, I should weep
Did I deem that thou wouldst not arise,
And, aroused from thy lethargy's sleep,
Glad the world with the light of thine eyes.
Though the spell of the marble hath bound thee,
Arise, burst thy bonds, and be free ;
Though many have sought thee, I have found thee ;
Awaken for me.

"Alas ! thou art deaf to my song ;
The body, bereft of its breath,
Though loveliness linger there long,
Is naught but inanimate death ;
The light of a life that is vanished
Forever and ever away,
The soul from its tenement banished,
Leaves only the clay.

"Ah, then, if my singing be vain,
Let me also be turned into stone,
And, dreaming beside thee, remain
At rest till the ages are flown ;

My heart with the marble is blended,
 A captive with thee in thy cell
 Till thou burst it, captivity ended,
 Forever to dwell."

Scarce had he ceased his song for breathing spell,
 When suddenly a crash awakes the night,
 And swiftly rising from her prison cell,
 He sees a wond'rous vision veiled in white,
 Which through the forest speeds with rapid flight,
 And, ere recovering from his first amaze
 He turns to follow her, is lost in sight,
 Completely hidden from his anxious gaze
 Amid the impenetrable forest's maze.

So, wisely deeming that pursuit was vain,
 Once more upon his lonely path he goes,
 His heart o'ershadowed by the bitter pain
 That he who finds love but to lose it knows,
 And, railing at misfortune, mourns his woes,
 Losing in Providence benign his trust,
 By brooding on his wrongs, more furious grows ;
 The prize attained, he cannot deem it just
 That in his hands it crumbles into dust.

Yet peaceful was the night, save when the owl
 Awoke the forest with his shrill too-whoo,
 Or from a distance came the wood-dog's howl,
 Disturbing with its sound the bats that flew

With whirring wings the spreading forest through.
The mossy sward was pleasant to the tread ;
Glow-worms enabled him his path to view ;
Aloft the interwoven branches spread
A leafy canopy above his head.

And all around the odours of the night
Distilled their perfume on the dewy breeze,
Laden with spicy fragrance, faint and slight.
The midnight exhalations of the trees,
Roses and violets and love-at-ease,
Their balmy breaths in sweet succession roll
Like soothing messengers, and by degrees,
Nature's soft arts assuaging wrath, there stole
A sense of calm and sweetness o'er his soul.

Earth seemed to draw him to her gentle breast,
Breathing upon his soul a soothing balm.
Longing to cleave to her and be at rest,
His soul went forth responsive to the charm,
Forgetting in her love his late alarm ;
Upon his mind Hope's fond suggestions press,
While calmer thoughts his fiercer moods disarm,
That somewhere in the forest's deep recess
Still lurks the maiden in her loveliness.

And as he muses thus, a rippling sound
Of girlish laughter floating on the breeze
Falls on his ear, and glancing quickly round,
With eager heart, and searching eye, he sees

A figure veiled in white among the trees.

"Why, when I roused thee, did'st thou fly the spot
Like as the fawn before the hunter flees?"

"Did I?" replied the maid. "I knew it not,
But follow now into my sheltering cot."

So with a saucy smile she shows the way,
And Adimo, who deems his joy complete,
Dreading no ill, with spirit light and gay,
Follows the winsome maid with footsteps fleet
Along a path untrod by human feet,
Or trampled by the hoofs of wandering kine,
Until they reach a cavernous retreat,
Before whose portals clematis and vine
With densely trailing foliage intertwine.

Obedient to her word, he swiftly flung
The vines aside, and saw a cavern, bare,
Save for a single lamp that, high uphung,
Filled all the chamber with a ruddy glare,
And shed a roseate radiance on the hair
Of the white maiden, while the flooding stream
Of light enveiled her limbs, so wondrous fair,
Yet so unreal, that cave and maiden seem
To Adimo the phantoms of a dream.

And dream he did, for though he felt her tone
Unmusically fall upon his ear,
He deemed it but the harshness of the stone,
And when she clasps his hands to draw him near,

He feels the icy touch without a fear,
Believing it the marble's chill that sent
The shiverings through his heart, which disappear,
Leaving a sense of self-abandonment,
Of utter listlessness, and calm content.

And when she speaks to him, it seems as though,
Like lovers parted, after many years,
Their souls once more in sweet communion flow.
The tales she tells, of mingled hopes and fears,
Of budding joys too early drowned in tears,
Of spirits weary worn with hope deferred,
Of love long-tried but true, delight his ears,
And, filled with ecstasy at what he heard,
He hangs intently on her every word.

Long time he listens to her magic strains,
Detecting in their sound no lurking ill,
Till firmly fettered by her silken chains,
With heart and mind submissive to her will,
And lulled by soothing sounds, as soft and still
As sighing breezes that at even creep
Along the surface of the rippling rill,
Or ruffle with their breath the glassy deep,
In calm unconsciousness he sinks to sleeps.

But, as he dreams, it seems to him he sees
The Beech-tree sighing to the midnight skies,
And mingling with the murmur of the breeze,
He hears the melancholy song arise,

“Speed, speed, Sir Knight, before my singer dies,”
And swiftly waking, with a strange amaze,
Gazes round him with a mute surprise ;
The lamp no longer shed its rosy rays,
Nor marble-maiden meets his anxious gaze.

But at the dimly lighted cavern’s mouth,
Against the foliage dark, that formed the door,
He saw an object hideous and uncouth
That some rude semblance of a woman bore,
Fashioned of bark decayed, whose fingers tore
A lock of hair ; and with renewed distress,
Found that his girdle spanned his waist no more ;
And with his bosom filled with bitterness
Viewed the destruction of his cherished tress.

Burning with anger, he essays to rise,
But, as he moves, the object turning round,
Gazing upon him with its stony eyes,
Transfixes him as firmly to the ground
As though with heavy iron fetters bound ;
Though in the face thus thrust upon his view
Traces of last night’s loveliness he found,
Yet seared with scars, and ghastly in its hue,
With corpse-like eyes that chilled him through and
through.

Like to the linnet, from its leafy nest
Torn by the fowler’s hands, lay Adimo

With palpitating heart and fluttering breast,
Till, reading in his piteous eyes his woe,
The figure laughs in scorn, and then, as though
To one who waits without, with mocking speech,
Exclaims with accents strangely hushed and
low,
"Enter, and seize him now, before the Beech
Shall, intervening, pluck him from thy reach."

And as she speaks he sees the leafy blind
Parted asunder by a spectral shade,
Transparent in its form and undefined,
That stooping enters. Adimo, dismayed,
Knew but too well the face the Ash displayed,
And sees too truly with a wild despair
That, lured with magic wiles, the Alder Maid
Holds him a helpless victim in her snare,
Robbed of his girdle of protecting hair.

With steady step he marks him gain his side
And for a moment, like a serpent, hang
With fascinating gaze, and fingers wide
Outstretched above his victim, when the clang
Of sounding steel amid the forest rang,
As though a sturdy axe, with mighty crash,
Against some monarch of the forest sprang,
And, turning livid at the sound, the Ash
Bellows and writhes like one beneath the lash.

And then, as though with furious rage unmanned,
Swiftly the spectre from the cavern flies,
On which the Alder maiden, turning, scanned
Adimo's visage with her scornful eyes,
As though disdaining such a puny prize ;
Then gliding through the wood is lost to sight.
And he, once more enabled to arise,
Forth from the cavern speeds with hasty flight,
Just as the dawning day dispels the night.

Onward he speeds, for terror lends him wings,
Nor stays his flight a backward glance to cast,
Till, breathless, on a flowery mead he flings
His weary body down, rejoiced at last
To find the long-unbroken forest past,
And sees a silver stream that dawning flushes
With roseate tinges, as she, flowing fast,
Veiling herself behind the emerald rushes,
Strives from the rising sun to hide her blushes.



CANTO II

THE RIVER

10

10

CANTO II

THE RIVER

How oft at night-time, lulled in soothing sleep,
Both mind and body peacefully at rest,
I lie, unmindful that the broad and deep
Atlantic, with its ever surging breast,
Rolls between me and those I love the best
And who return my love ; but oh, how few
They are whose eyes are turned towards the West
With loving thoughts of me ; I would I knew
Of many, but am only sure of two.

Of two ! How small the number seems, but they
To me are worth a thousand, for I know
Their loving hearts will ever, day by day,
Be with me still, where'er so'er I go,
To mingle with my life for weal or woe,
Trusting in me, though all the world may blame
The absent son and brother, for they know
That I would cast no blemish on their name
Nor heedless drag it through the depths of shame.

But with the spreading ocean bridged by dreams,
I clasp them to my heart in sleeping hours,
And, strengthened by their love, my spirit seems
To rise refreshed, as do the drooping flowers
When softly sprinkled by the quickening showers,
Blessing the dreams that with a spell so light
Can cheer the heart when sadness darkest lowers,
And, buoyed on wings of fancy, speed their flight
From couch to couch throughout the livelong night.

For I, like Adimo, essayed to grasp
A longed-for prize, but when, with hand of might,
I crushed all obstacles, and strove to clasp
The cherished form, it vanished from my sight
Amid the darkness of the encircling night,
And, idly dreaming all ambitions vain,
With adverse fortune would I cease to fight,
But that the thoughts of those I love sustain
My heart and urge me to the strife again.

I left my hero breathless on a bank,
Wondering what hand such timely succour brought.
Had he some friendly forest sylph to thank,
Or had some errant knight his rescue wrought?
Perhaps Sir Percival himself, he thought,
Eager the righteous quarrel to maintain,
In deeds of chivalry and action sought
To cleanse his spirit from the Alder's stain,
And so his lost contentment to regain.

Roused from his musings by the rippling song
 Of rushing waters, Adimo espied
 The river flowing rapidly along
 Between its banks, and, tethered at its side,
 With graceful motion sees a shallop ride,
 And filled with eagerness no more delays
 But hastily embarks, drops with the tide,
 And, as he passes, peacefully surveys
 The lovely spots the shifting scene displays.

The water-lilies on its breast unfold
 Their spotless flowers on thrones of vivid green,
 The glorious Champac, with its leaves of gold,
 Dazzling the vision with their brilliant sheen,
 Studding the banks on either side are seen,
 And giant palms, whose feathery fronds o'ershade
 The sloping margins with their leafy screen ;
 While glittering dewdrops hang on every blade
 Of grass that glistens in the verdant glade.

Beyond he sees a copse whose leaves are mingled
 With glowing shades of yellow, brown, and red,
 As if the ruthless Autumn's hand had singled,
 Now here, now there, a leaf for winds to shed,
 And round the roots upon a mossy bed
 The violets arise in purple masses,
 Or dandelion rears its golden head,
 While the soft breeze of early morning passes
 With balmy breath among the scented grasses.

And so throughout the daytime drifts his boat
Banks clothed with ever-varying verdure by,
While far above his head the cloud-wreaths float
In forms fantastic o'er the changeful sky,
And birds with plumage gay delight his eye,
As borne on buoyant wings they skim the stream,
Or like an arrow through the forest fly,
Until, the day far spent, the sun-rays seem
To cast upon the tide their lengthiest gleam.

Then disembarked he rests among the meadows,
And sates his hunger on the bounteous store
Of fruits around, until the evening shadows
Across the water deepen more and more,
Then strengthened and refreshed, he leaves the shore
And drives his shallop lightly o'er the wave,
Urged swiftly onward by the bending oar,
No sound commingling with its plashing save
The murmuring ripples that its gunnels lave.

But as amid the stillness of the night
He sculls with rapid oar, he seems aware
Of a mysterious figure veiled in white
That steers his boat—a vision wondrous fair.
But when he, marvelling at her presence there,
Dropping his oars, to touch her garment sought,
He sees her quickly vanish into air,
And feels his mind filled with the single thought
The Marble Maiden to his vision brought.

The moon ascends on high, and one by one
 The stars are mirrored on the river's breast ;
 Their silvery sparkle on the waters thrown
 Dances awhile on every ripple's crest,
 Or on some eddying whirlpool seems to rest
 But for a moment, then with twinkling flash,
 As though they sought the shallop's strength to test,
 Flood with their light the tiny waves that dash
 Against the bottom with melodious splash.

To Adimo the noises of the night
 Seemed in his heart in harmony to blend,
 Till, as the moon attained a greater height,
 The chilly breezes that on night attend
 Their mournful wailings through the branches send,
 Seeming as though with restless hearts they rove
 The Earth, bewailing some departed friend.
 He moors his bark within a sheltered cove
 And spreads his couch within a neighbouring grove.

And thus for many days he calmly drifts
 Through flower-besprinkled vale and grassy plain,
 Until one day, as ruddy dawning lifts
 And rends the mists of early morn in twain,
 In the far west he sees a spreading chain
 Of lofty mountains, on whose summit lies
 The snow that fled not in the winter's train,
 But proudly from its home among the skies
 The scorching power of the sun defies.

Though ever and anon some passing cloud
Across the dome of heaven wings its flight,
And in its passage, covering with its shroud,
Conceals the snow-capped summits from the sight,
And veils the mountains in a shadowy night ;
Erelong it passes, and the hills command
Wonder and awe, as crowned with spotless white,
Exalted to the heavens, they proudly stand ;
Like altars of the Lord, sublime and grand.

Ye silent hills, whose very silence seems
To utter more than mortal tongue can tell,
As though, enthroned amid the land of dreams,
Ye could the purposes of Fate foretell ;
Oh ! could I draw from ye as from a well
The living waters of forgotten lore,
And so in loftiness of mind excel
And crowned with everlasting wisdom soar
The clouds of ignorance and error o'er.

I do not seek for love ; it cannot be
That Love so far removed from man should dwell.
Love rather lurks beneath the forest tree,
Within the modest violet's azure cell,
Or, hidden in the hyacinthine bell,
Or, half in coyness, half in mirth, conceals
Her form bewitching in some shady dell,
Whence with insidious fragrances she steals,
And to the captive heart her power reveals.

But ye ! whose heads are hoary with the rime
 Of countless centuries—ye rugged rocks !
 Who bear upon your sides the prints of Time,
 Although, as if defiant of its shocks,
 Each cloud-commingling summit proudly mocks
 Its puny efforts to efface your range,
 And in some glacier-guarded cavern locks
 The hidden records of convulsions strange,
 That marked the surface of the world with change.

I deem that from the world of change apart
 Wisdom above your peaks is hovering.
 Bid her reveal her presence, that my heart
 Of Nature's hidden mysteries may sing ;
 Contented but from her primeval spring
 To taste the draught for which my spirit longs,
 I shall not seek to equal Israel's king,
 The wisest of the wise, to whom belongs
 The fame attendant on the Song of Songs.

Come forth, sweet Wisdom ! from thy lofty bower,
 That, swiftly mellowed in thy glorious shine,
 My budding mind may blossom into flower
 And lay its offerings on thine ancient shrine
 (First fruit of centuries ! this heart of mine
 Is flecked with stains of ignorance and malice,
 Oh ! let me lave it in thy stream divine,)
 That flowing freely from thy snowy palace
 My soul may drink of thee from Nature's chalice.

Then deign to bless thy fervent worshipper
Who sighs for thee with longings past conceiving.
Come to my weed-choked soul to minister ;
Pluck out the tares and poppies, only leaving
The golden-crested corn for harvest sheaving,
That I, thy humble suppliant, may rejoice
Such glorious gifts and benefits receiving,
And ever to thy praise my heart and voice
Shall pour their strains most delicately choice.

So Adimo, such longings in his breast,
Pausing awhile in rapture to behold
The shimmering glory of each sparkling crest
Wrapt in its snowy robe, whose every fold
Flashed forth resplendent, decked with dawning's
gold,
Turning his simple breakfast to prepare,
Espies Sir Percival come o'er the wold,
And gladly hastens with his friend to share
In welcome fellowship his frugal fare.

And as he neared him, Adimo was glad
To mark a change had come upon the knight.
His noble countenance seemed not so sad ;
His rusted armour flecked with patches bright,
The fruit of many a blow received in fight,
That in the golden sunlight brightly flash,
And many a scratch, as if from left to right,
Some sword had slanted in its deadly clash ;
And in his helm he wore a sprig of Ash.

Sir Percival accepts the proffered fare,
Smiling so sadly Adimo could trace
Upon his lofty brow the lines of care,
That brooded still upon the deep disgrace
No knightly efforts could as yet efface ;
And as he gazed his spirits lost their lightness,
The burning blush of shame o'erspread his face.
He, like the knight, had stained his soul's pure
whiteness,
Yet made no effort to restore its brightness.

So Adimo, throughout the frugal meal,
Is stilled by shame, and though the knight espied
The woe the singer's heart would fain conceal,
In sympathetic silence at his side
He sits as though he nothing had descried.
Their silent breakfast ended, they arise
And with a warm farewell their ways divide.
Adimo swiftly down the river flies ;
Sir Percival toward the mountains hies.

But quickly Adimo forgot his grief,
Beholding sloping lawns with flowers bespangled,
And diamond dewdrops hung on every leaf
That decked the shrubs whose golden tassels dangled
Above the stream, where wind and water wrangled,
And waterfowl with brilliant plumage springing
Forth from their nests amid the rushes tangled.
Earth, sky and water all conspired in flinging
His grief aside—to set his heart a-singing.

Once more contented at his oar he toils,
Till, passing swiftly round a wooded bend,
The water round his shallop seethes and boils,
And in tumultuous eddyings descend,
And, white with spume a whirling passage rend
Amid a long expanse of rock and stone,
Whose milky summits with the waters blend,
And, o'er the seething stream but slightly shown,
Can scarcely from the furious foam be known.

The rapids traversed, at the riverside
He sees a lonely boy in deep distress,
Who, seeing Adimo, essayed to hide
Behind his hands his tears of bitterness
But vainly strove his sobbings to repress,
For Adimo his piteous wailings hears
And longs his infant sorrows to redress ;
So to the shore the bounding skipper steers
And bids him tell the reason of his tears.

With intermingling sobs the boy replied,
"But late disporting at the river's brink,
Holding my mirror o'er the flowing tide
To catch the reflected sunlit ripples' blink,
It fell from out my grasp. I saw it sink
Beneath the waters nigh yon sedges green.
Fain would I rescue it but that I shrink,
Awed by the currents, for the glass had been
A matchless present from the Fairy Queen."



His sorrows told, he turns his head away
 And for a little while in silence weeps.
 Determined the adventure to essay,
 Gazing a moment on the watery deeps,
 Adimo lightly from his shallop leaps,
 And soon his lusty strokes the waves divide
 Around the clump of sedge that vigil keeps
 Above the ripples where the boy espied
 His mirror sink beneath the flowing tide.

The sedges gained, without a thought of dread,
 Though with resistless force the torrent flows,
 He dives into the depths—above his head
 With gurgling sound the parted billows close—
 And finds himself entangled in the throes
 Of some tumultuous whirlpool's circling rounds
 That draw him closer as he downward goes,
 Till, worn with struggling, deafened by its sounds,
 He helpless sinks within its narrow bounds.

Deeper and deeper Adimo descends ;
 Faster around the narrowing circle flies,
 Until, the bottom gained, his journey ends ;
 Then for a moment motionless he lies
 Breathing a prayer, then turning round, descries
 A maiden where the current stillest lay,
 And gazing at her with his foam-dimmed eyes,
 Deemed his dulled senses did his sight betray
 With but a phantasy of shimmering spray.

But, phantasy or not, his eye could trace
A dainty figure robed in silvery blue,
Bordered with heavy bands of foam-like lace ;
The girdle of a deeper azure hue ;
A single crystal from her forehead threw
A lustrous glory on her face and hair
That seemed the very waters to imbue.
And all oblivious of his late despair,
He feasts his eyes upon the vision fair.

Approaching Adimo, she bids him rise,
And gratefully he takes her proffered hand,
But wondering much, he sees in mute surprise
(The whirlpool motionless at her command ;
Its ragings hushed in stilly silence stand)
The encircling eddies, pausing in their flow,
On either side their watery walls expand,
Forming a path through which in silence go
The Maiden of the Spray and Adimo.

And soon they reach a curious caverned rock,
Not with the rugged shape of crags unflung
By some convulsive earthquake's furious shock ;
It seemed like one of Nature's temples sprung
From Chaos hoary when the world was young.
The walls with many a time-smoothed pebble glowed ;
With glistening stalactites its roof was hung ;
Its polished floors and massive pillars showed
An air of age by centuries bestowed.

Within the cave the noises of the tide,
 By distance hushed, in silence die away,
 And Adimo, half-fearful of his guide,
 Seeing her still, despite the crystal's ray,
 Apparently enveiled in mist-like spray,
 Begins his scattered senses to regain,
 And thus addresses her, "Fair vision, say
 If thou be real or a phantom vain,
 A dim creation of my dizzy brain."

"Real," the maid replied ; "Ay, more than real ;
 In me, as in a perfect spirit, blend
 The human and divine in one ideal,
 That mortal minds would vainly comprehend ;
 For some, the goal to which their searches tend,
 Shining before them like a beacon bright ;
 And some my penetrating rays offend ;
 Others there are who dimly see my light
 Through mists of ignorance that cloud their sight.

"And they who seek in me a soul complete,
 The world encompasses with many a snare
 And hidden pitfalls, fatal to the feet,
 Of them that walk in darkness, unaware
 How many a lurking foe besets them there,
 Eager their earnest searchings to suppress ;
 And many a peril must they bravely dare,
 But Hope and Faith their wandering steps shall bless
 And Love dispel their sorrows' bitterness.

"Though all unheard amid this still retreat,
Above our heads the streams of discord rave,
Whirlpools of doubt and eddies of deceit,
And rabid ignorance, whose greedy wave
Drowns in its tide the loving and the brave,
And worldly currents struggle to forbid
The passage of the soul that seeks the cave
Where Truth, of all conflicting billows rid,
Full many a fathom deep lies closely hid.

"But thou, amid the whirlpool's circling stream,
I saw in darkness groping after me
And well nigh lost, although thou didst not deem
Thy wandering steps to Truth were leading thee ;
For he who would my unclouded presence see
Must learn with humble heart himself to know.
In this the mirror shall thy tutor be ;
Thy soul its shadow on the glass must throw
And to thine eyes thy mirrored spirit show."

So saying, to the cavern's further edge
The maid the still bewildered singer led,
And there before him, on a rocky ledge,
He saw the mirror lie, and swiftly sped
To seize the prize. Then, turning to retread
His path, his feet from under him were torn,
And he, before a pulse of time had fled,
By upward currents to the surface borne,
Gazes once more upon the light of morn.

Anon with rapid strokes he gained the shore,
Then stayed the rescued treasure to behold,
And views its frame of crystal covered o'er
With intersecting bars of beaten gold,
Embossed with many a carving quaint and old
Of scenes from bygone days when earth was young,
That seemed some hidden meaning to unfold ;
Here prayed the prophet ; there the harper strung
His tuneful harp Engeddi's caves among.

Meanwhile the boy, who watched with anxious fears
The spot where Adimo from sight had sank
For his arising, through his welling tears
Seeing him with the mirror gain the bank,
Now breathless hastens Adimo to thank.
“ Sir Knight, if, as I deem, thou art a knight,
For well thy chivalry becomes that rank,
How can I show my gratitude aright
For thy compassion on my piteous plight ?

“ The priceless gift thou hast to me restored,
From thee a second time becomes a gift,
A doubly precious thing for me to hoard ;
And know the magic of this glass can lift
The curtains from the fleecy clouds that drift
Across the sky, and in the glass displayed,
Their luminous component vapours shift
In forms fantastical and strange, arrayed
In the dull glow of many a varying shade.”

"Do thou upon the glittering mirror breathe,
And, as thy breath shall from the surface roll
And swiftly vanish in a mist-like wreath,
Gaze on the glass and read as in a scroll
The hidden secrets of thy mirrored soul
That stands revealed with all its joy and woe,
And more than many sages men extol
(Stars in the distant skies of long ago)
Shalt learn, in learning of thyself to know."

Eager to test the virtues of the glass,
Adimo hastily the boy obeyed,
And o'er its surface sees a shadow pass
Whose wavering form and feeble lines displayed
Conflicting flecks of mingled light and shade,
That seemed in circles aimlessly to roll,
Save when some stronger one, diverging, made
A vain, spasmodic effort to control
The wayward motions of the unsettled soul.

Here restlessness prevails on every side,
Dimming the light of Faith's enfeebled glow,
And near the centre lurks insidious Pride,
Striving its darkness over all to throw,
Until encountered by the rays that flow
From generous love and its attendant sphere,
Humility of heart, Pride's deadliest foe,
That, piercing clouds of Hate and Envy, cheer
The strife of Courage with ignoble fear.

With conscious shame he feels his bosom swell ;
A dimness overspreads his aching eyes,
And on the instant, breathing no farewell,
He drops the glass and to the river flies,
And launching hastily his shallop, tries,
By energetic labours at his oar,
To quell the griefs that in his heart arise ;
And speedily the bounding vessel bore
The singer and his sorrows from the shore.

For many days he drifted on the stream
(The fleeting hours unheeded came and went),
Still brooding on his wounded self-esteem,
Until one evening, as the sunset sent
Its dancing shadows o'er the firmament,
A scene of wondrous beauty greets his eyes
And calmer feelings with his sadness blent ;
Then rising from his seat in glad surprise
He feasts his vision on the paradise.

The very skies are still ; all Nature shares
With Adimo the calm and peaceful feeling ;
The river banks are bright with gay parterres,
The fairest flowers of every hue revealing,
Whose fragrant breath upon the breezes stealing
In clouds of odour to his boat repair,
While all around are spreading trees, concealing
The nests of birds who, decked with plumage fair,
On joyous pinions love to hover there.

Beyond, a palace stands, whose glowing wall
Gleams like an opal as the sunset dyes
Of crimson glory on its surface fall,
And crowned with sparkling minarets that rise
In graceful forms against the roseate skies,
Pointed with silver stars that downward throw
A mystic radiance soothing to the eyes,
Its gates with overlaid gold aglow,
Through which the winding river seems to flow.

And as his tiny shallop swiftly nears
The steps that stand before the massive gate,
Adimo to a marble jetty steers,
And, eagerly resolved to penetrate
The wondrous palace, leaps with heart elate
Forth from his boat and hauls her on the shore,
Thereby escaping an untimely fate,
For down a dark abyss hard by the door
The river plunges with tumultuous roar.

Passing the gates, which at his touch expand,
He enters, through a stately colonnade,
An open court where polished pillars stand
On every side in avenues arrayed,
Their glistening tempered with mysterious shade ;
And in its midst a mighty fountain rose,
Whose falling streams a pleasant murmur made
Of rippling melodies, more sweet than those
That lulled the sirens' victims to repose.



Although below the horizon of the West,
 To shed on other lands his genial rays,
 The sun had long since hid his gleaming crest,
 So high the fountain throws its glistening sprays,
 That still its overarching stream displays
 The long descended sun's reflected glow,
 And like the vanished light of other days,
 With rays subdued, the lingering memories throw
 A mystic glamour on the court below.

Leaving the court, through winding labyrinths
 Of marble columns of the purest white,
 Springing like stately palms from silver plinths
 That seem to glimmer with a frosty light,
 He threads his way, and turning to the right,
 Down a dark passage sees a portal low,
 Whose ebon panels bear in letters white,
 Sparkling with flashes like the glow-worms' glow
 On night-veiled banks, the name of "ADIMO."

Entering, Adimo the room surveys,
 And sees within a niche a downy bed,
 While from the open hearth the ruddy blaze
 A home-like air about the chamber shed,
 And in the middle stands a table spread
 With choicest dainties, delicate and rare,
 And flagons filled with wines, both white and red ;
 Then sitting down in a luxurious chair
 Partakes with hungry zest the welcome fare.

And as he feasts, he sees his every wish
Anticipated by some forms unseen,
That fill the empty glass and pass the dish,
As has through every age the custom been
In regions governed by the Fairy Queen.
His supper ended to the bed he goes
And peaceful slumbers soon his senses screen
From wakeful memories of earthly woes,
And soothe his weary limbs with still repose.

But as in peaceful slumbers wrapt he lies,
His mind is visited by curious dreams
That Fancy to his sleep-locked thoughts supplies ;
And severed from the world of life, he seems
To find himself within a hall that teems
With moving marble forms, that swiftly throng
Across its pillared aisles in countless streams,
And lightly glide in graceful steps along,
Their measures timing to an unheard song.

But on his entering, the shadows all,
Like startled children, from their dances fly,
And, mounting pedestals that line the wall,
In marble motionless their motions die.
One distant pedestal attracts his eye,
Where seemingly beneath a gloomy shade
Two feet alone revealed can he descry ;
And yet those graceful forms to him displayed
The unseen presence of his Marble Maid.

But swiftly dawning on his dreaming broke ;

His slumbers ended with the starlit tide,
And fresh from Nature's nursing he awoke,

And having risen, to the table hied
To taste the breakfast unknown hands provide ;
And while he lingers o'er the dainty fare

He seems to hear the unseen attendants glide
About the chamber, as though here and there
They deftly hover with the food they bear.

His breakfast ended, Adimo essays

With wondering eyes the palace to explore ;
Through arching colonnades and winding ways

He passes onward through a brazen door
Into a chamber whose mosaic floor

Was all of marble ; this, the central hall,

A dome of wondrous vastness covered o'er,
And everywhere around, on roof and hall,
A flush of rosy lustre seemed to fall.

And wandering idly, Adimo beholds

Nine portals in the walls with curtains hung
Of crimson silk, behind whose draping folds

Nine flower-like lamps from twining branches swung,
Whose brightness, piercing through the curtains, flung
Around the central hall a crimson glow ;

And as he gazes, from his bosom sprung
A stream of peaceful thoughts, that come and go
Like silent melodies in rhythmic flow.

But while in harmonies his fancies fleet,
He hears the noise as of a countless throng
Of surging dancers, who with joyous feet
Mark the same measure as they glide along
That moulds his fancies in the unuttered song.
The parted screen a life of statues shows,
Not with the stillness that to stones belong,
But resting on their pedestals as those
Who lingering stand in transient repose.

And mindful of his dream, he passes through
The halls connected by encircling ways,
Eager the visions of his dreams to view ;
And as his anxious eyes the ninth surveys,
A vacant pedestal attracts his gaze,
And yet he fancies, dimly resting there,
A snowy foot the ebon plinth displays,
But o'er his head the lamps the inscription bear
"Touch not," in letters of a golden glare.

Adimo sees the warning, and withstands
The strong temptation, else had he explored
The space above the plinth with reverend hands,
Seeking the vision that his heart adored,
Known, loved and lost ; long lost and still deplored.
So with despondent heart, oppressed with woes,
And gloomy thoughts, with disappointment stored,
And aimless step that no direction knows,
Once more upon his wanderings sadly goes.

At length, as rambling onward, wrapt in gloom,
Scarce heeding where his roaming feet are bound,
He finds himself within a spacious room,
And looking down with wondering eyes, he found
Only a narrow pathway running round
A sparkling pool, whose tiny ripples cross
From side to side in melodies of sound,
And seemed in childlike merriment to toss
Their mimic waves against the marble fosse.

The vaulted roof above, of azure hue,
Deep as the heavens on a moonlit night,
When no obscuring clouds obstruct the view,
Was all with scintillating stars be-dight,
Whose mirrored splendour made the waters bright,
And seemed upheld by sculptured maidens, seen
In the four corners, yet so wondrous light
Their draperies showed, that one had deemed them
been
Fashioned from textures of a silken sheen.

The first, in garments of a silvery white,
Whose virgin hues no brighter colours show,
Save on her bosom, where 'mid foliage bright,
The clustering sprigs of crimson berries glow,
Like drops of blood upon the stainless snow ;
And through the shining tresses of her hair
Is twined a wreath of pearl-like mistletoe,
As though some master's hand the vision fair
Had snatched from out his dreams and fixed her there.

The second's robes are of the radiant blue ;
The fair forget-me-not's sweet floweret shows
Looped up with primroses of palest hue,
And in her hair a golden crocus blows.
The third in draperies of deepest rose
That, falling round her form with careless fold,
Parted, as though by sudden gust, disclose
To those, who with far-seeing eyes behold,
Their linings of the dandelion's gold.

Her head was wreathed with roses pure and white
As those that bloomed about the virgin's pyre,
Yet were not than the stainless soul more bright,
That, panting for her Lord with such desire,
Feared not to seek him through the flaming fire.
The fourth, whose robes were decked with golden maize
That toned the deeper tints of her attire
Dyed in the mellow lights of autumn days,
A diadem of purple vine displays.

Adimo, gazing on the water's breast,
Under its surface marvelled to behold
The mirage of the roof inverted rest,
That, like a deeper sea, seemed to uphold
And clasp the ripples that above it rolled ;
And suddenly across his bosom creeps
A strange desire that cannot be controlled,
And throwing off his clothes he swiftly leaps
Into the middle of the crystal deeps.

Stirred for a moment by his buoyant springing,
 Warm to his touch the limpid waters part,
 And then in liquid folds around him clinging,
 Seem to enliven and refresh his heart.

He leaves the star-sprent surface but to dart
 Into its hidden depths with open eyes,

Piercing the lower deeps with skilful art,
 And, as he plunges, views with fresh surprise
 That ocean scenery around him lies.

His eyes a field of tangled seaweeds view,
 And coral rocks by ceaseless billows worn,
 And bright anemones of varying hue,
 As brilliant as the shades of early morn
 Across the peaks of snow-clad mountains borne ;
 And with awakened terror dreads that he,
 The victim of some vengeful fairy scorn,
 On rising to the upper depths shall be
 Adrift alone upon a shoreless sea.

But rising to the top with rapid stroke,
 He sees the figures round the pool again,
 And suddenly upon his hearing broke,
 In sounds distinct, the former heartfelt strain,
 Waking with melodies his echoing brain ;
 And swiftly speeding to the central hall,
 He passes through the curtains—all in vain ;
 A death-like stillness hovers over all
 The rows of marble forms that line the wall.

Hall after hall he tries, but still it seems
Each corridor but lifeless figures shows.
Then Adimo remembers in the dreams,
That did the dancers to his eyes disclose,
The strong desire that suddenly arose
To mingle freely with the moving tide,
Whose dancing broke upon his dreams' repose,
And feels that impulse must his actions guide
Ere he can burst on them unnoticed.

For many happy days did Adimo
Linger content amid the palace walls,
And in the pool with silver stars aglow
He finds renewed delight that never palls,
But most he loves to haunt the central halls,
Whose loveliness the tinted lights enhance ;
Until one night, as wandering to and fro,
He enters in the Seventh Hall by chance,
Bursting upon the figures in their dance.

At his approach, toward their pedestals
In hurrying crowds the startled statues hie,
But turning, speed again their carnivals,
Seeing how useless their attempts to fly,
Detected in their dance by mortal eye ;
But as he nearer draws, the dancers part,
Opening a passage, as he passing by
The moving offspring of the sculptor's art,
The ninth hall enters with a beating heart.

On entering the ninth, to his delight,
 The dancers, all regardless of his gaze,
 Scarce heed his entrance, as, with footsteps light,
 They, deftly whirling down its long arrays,
 With graceful motions thread the winding maze ;
 And passing swiftly by the moving chain,
 The distant corner Adimo surveys,
 And in its sheltered niche, with burning brain,
 He sees the vacant pedestal again.

The vacant pedestal ! and he had sought
 Upon that pedestal to find his queen,
 Whose form had filled his every waking thought,
 And ever in the long night watches seen,
 Had for so long his cherished object been ;
 But dimly conscious of her presence there,
 Concealed behind some unknown cloudlike screen,
 He gazes at the plinth with stony stare,
 In the intensity of deep despair.

But as he, gazing, stands with tearful eyes,
 He seems the snowy feet again to trace,
 And at the sight he feels his courage rise,
 And in his heart determines to displace
 The cloudy envelope that shrouds her face.
 So, standing silently, he muses long
 How the encircling darkness to efface,
 Until the thoughts that o'er his bosom throng
 Urge him to test once more the power of song.

And for the first time since his gloomy fall
Into the hidden snare, the Alder's prize,
His tuneful melodies obey his call,
And from his heart in harmonies arise,
And every dancer stays in mute surprise,
Moved by the wondrous sweetness of his song ;
Then, quickened by the strain, the measure flies,
As ringing through the hallways clear and strong,
It dies away their vaulted roofs among.

" Queen of my heart ! my song awakes
With trouble and sorrow and fear,
And even my breast of the glooms partakes
That hovers around thee here ;
But the light of my love through the cloud wreath breaks,
And my spirit sings, Thou art near.

" By day and night have I dreamed
Of thee and only of thee,
And oft when the moonlight streamed
On the breast of the night-swathed lea,
Her smiling face but a mirror seemed
Bright with thy smiles for me.

" The night winds touch from afar
The lips of the trailing vine ;
On the bosom of night lies the even star
In the calm of her love divine,
But I, with a rapture sweeter far,
Would bask in the light of thine.



"Sun of my life ! as the dawn
 O'er the crest of the mountains seen,
 When the diamond drops on the dew-decked lawn
 Flash amid emerald green,
 Burst through the clouds and in Love's bright morn,
 Come to my heart, my queen."

Lo, as he sings, a figure dimly seen
 Poised on the ebon pedestal arose,
 As though enveloped in a gauze-like screen,
 That, as his song continues, clearer grows ;
 So lifelike seems her form, he scarcely knows
 If maid or marble statue he espies,
 And dazzled by the light that round her glows,
 Had turned as from the noontide sun his eyes,
 Save that his song unwonted power supplies.

"Through the dim mists of darkness clearer growing,
 I see thee rise,
 A nestling bud to glorious blossom blowing
 Before mine eyes ;
 The stream of life that from thy heart is flowing
 My heart supplies.

"Long have I wandered on the winding river
 Thy face to see ;
 Oft have I bade the roving winds deliver
 My love to thee,
 Until I saw the very branches quiver,
 Pitying me.

"Ah ! blame me not if on my love relying,
No gift I bring, ~
Saving a heart that learns, amid its sighing,
Of thee to sing
Welling with streams of love for thee undying,
Burst from their spring.

"Shine through the clouds that, still around thee clinging,
Unveil thy breast ;
Forth from the gloom with arms extended springing,
To mine be pressed,
And my fond heart, a-wearied by its singing,
On thine shall rest."

He stays his singing as the clouds unfold,
And then upon the sable plinth displayed,
Enrobed in radiant white, his eyes behold
The graceful figure of his Marble Maid ;
But as her features Adimo surveyed,
The transient spark of soul-lit life had flown
And marble coldness round her figure played.
Yet he rejoiced though visible alone,
His queen was found, though found in lifeless stone.

But as he gazes on her loveliness,
His heart, inspired by her beauty's charm,
Burns but one kiss upon her lips to press.
Unmindful that to touch was fraught with harm,

He lifts her from her throne with loving arm,
Pressing her close to his enraptured heart,
But, as he kisses her, in wild alarm
The maiden wakes to life with sudden start,
And struggling tears her from his arms apart.

“Unheeding that you are, why did you dare
To touch me with your hands?” she sadly cries,
And wailing bitterly, the maiden fair,
Wringing her hands, adown the passage flies.
Adimo stands in motionless surprise
But for a moment, then across the floor,
With flying footsteps, in pursuit he hies,
And sees her vanish through an oaken door,
With bolts of rusted iron studded o’er.

Swiftly he follows through the heavy door
That closed behind him with a jarring sound,
And finds himself upon a wind-swept moor
With scattered tombstones lying all around,
Like ghastly spectres springing from the ground.
All else was wrapt in gloom ; a moonless night
Her mantle round the earth had closely wound ;
No stars were visible in Heaven’s height
To cheer his spirit with their sparkling light.

And as he stands, not knowing where to go,
A figure rushes past him veiled in white.
“You should have sung to me,” she murmurs low,
And speeding onward in her rapid flight,

A towering tombstone hides her from his sight.
He follows fast, but spirited away

The vision seems behind the veil of night,
And baffled by the stones that round him lay,
He yields the chase to wait the dawning day.

Then, weeping bitterly, he laid his head

Upon a fallen tomb with moss o'ergrown,
And worn with grief, as on a downy bed,

He calmly sleeps upon a stubborn stone
Until the gloomy hours of night are flown.

Then, feeling in his heart pursuit were vain,

His doom to dree his weary weird alone,

With saddened spirit he departs again

With aimless steps across the spreading plain.

And as the sun towards his zenith rose,

A shriek of laughter falls upon his ears,

And from the mound from whence the discord flows

A woman, bowed beneath the weight of years,

With hideous face and wrinkled brow, appears ;

And drawing near, as though amazed to see

Around his eyes the trace of recent tears,

Alas ! he weeps for one who will not be

The prize bestowed upon such a one as he.

Presumptuous heart, that vainly hoped to win
The bride nobler one than thou shall wed ;

Safe shall she rest her love's embraces in,

To thee and to thy heart as are the dead

That live but in the light that memories shed ;
Hers is the joy and yours the bitterness."

But Adimo with manly spirit said,
" Nay, if a nobler heart my love possess,
My heart shall glory in her happiness."

" Then stay with me," the withered beldame cried,

" Am I not fairer than the Marble Maid ?

Behold me now," and almost stupefied,

He sees the withered face so late displayed

In all the budding charms of youth arrayed,

Her figure fair as is a summer day,

While golden locks about her forehead strayed ;

But boldly he replied, " I will not stay,"

And, followed by her laughter, went his way.



CANTO III

THE PLAIN

CANTO III

THE PLAIN

ACROSS the voiceless waves of shoreless time
The day pursues the night on golden wing
And poised amid the vaults of space sublime,
Where myriad stars their torch-like radiance fling,
The ever-circling planets ceaseless sing.
The changing seasons have their changeless round,
Year after year succeeding, shadowing ;
The flowers on which the winter's frost hath frowned,
By Spring renewed, again bestrew the ground.

The vapours lifted from the watery main,
Whose whirling spouts the mariners discern,
In freshening showers fall to earth again.
Yet are there things that never shall return
Forth from the depths of Time's funereal urn.
The loving voices, now no longer heard,
Of dear ones lost, for whom our bosoms yearn ;
The life of vanished days—the uttered word—
And opportunities too long deferred.

These are the thoughts the teacher would instil
Into the bosom of the wayward boy,
But all in vain he strives, the childish will
Is firmly fettered by the present joy,
Nor heeds the voice that would his mirth alloy.
The years fly on ; into the world he goes,
Where cares on every side his steps annoy,
And, taught by trouble, all too late he knows
The lessons gathered in the school of woes.

Thus had it been with Adimo, and he,
But lately severed from his youthful play,
Was learning fast on Life's tempestuous sea
That grief and sorrow, doubting and dismay,
And fierce temptations round his footsteps lay,
And humbler growing from his frequent falls,
His wonted pride was fading fast away ;
Though lurking cowardice his soul appals,
His latent courage strove to burst its thralls.

For many days he wanders on the plain,
Nor house nor habitation meets his eye.
He scans the distant scene, but all in vain ;
Spreading afar to every quarter lie,
Around the unbroken plain, above the sky ;
No roving kine nor untamed beast of prey
Disturb the solitude, no bird is nigh ;
A stilly silence all around him lay,
Save when with song he cheered his lonely way.

Spirit of Love ! when sunset glow
 On weary earth was falling,
 I watched the lengthening shadows grow
 And heard the nightbird calling ;
 But ever her songs seemed sad with wrongs
 And joys too early over ;
 The night-winds wept as they lightly swept
 O'er fragrant fields of clover.

Spirit of Love ! when day was o'er
 And silent night was darkling,
 I stood on the verge of the Ocean's shore
 When moonlit waves were sparkling.
 The sullen splash of the billows' crash
 On rocky headlands breaking
 Seemed not more strong than the angry song
 Within my heart awaking ;

" Spirit of Love ! when autumn days
 Shone fair upon the river,
 I loved to watch the sunset rays
 On every ripple quiver,
 And as we flew the waters through,
 Love burst the bonds that bound me,
 And taught my gladdened heart to view
 The happiness around me.

" Spirit ! the autumn days are flown,
 The flower of love is blighted ;

Once more I roam the woods alone,
By shades of grief benighted ;
And though the breeze, among the trees,
All bare of leaves, is wailing,
I gaze on high ; across the sky,
The moon of Hope is sailing.'

One evening, as the twilight shadows creep
Across the prairie in a lengthening file,
He sees a lake whose glassy waters sweep
Around the margin of a verdant isle,
On which the sunset casts a lingering smile.
From shore to shore a fallen poplar spanned,
In rude simplicity, the stream's defile,
And, nestled on the lake-encircled land,
Amid the trees, he sees a cottage stand.

Pausing upon the threshold, Adimo
Had scarcely smote the door, when from within
A voice of thrilling sweetness seemed to flow,
That bids the weary wanderer enter in.
Within the house he sees a woman spin.
Wondrous her beauty, though unwonted years
Of more than mortal span had seared her skin ;
Above her brow her silver hair appears
As yet unscathed by Time's relentless shears.

But as she rises, Adimo espies
About her features a mysterious glow,

And marks in wonderment her lustrous eyes
 Illumed by streams of youthful light that flow
 From love volcanic in the depths below ;
And at the bidding of the ancient dame,
 He seats himself upon a settle low,
Beside a fire that from its white-tiled frame
Leaps gaily upward in a ruddy flame.

The cravings of her hungry guest allayed,
 She lifts the abandoned distaff from the ground,
And speeds the labours by his entrance stayed.
 The flying spindle circles swiftly round,
 And ever mingling with its whirring sound,
Her silvery voice in joyous carols blends,
 And by the rapid motion deftly wound,
The twisted flax in shimmering line descends,
Whose ceaseless coilings seem to know no ends.

Adimo turns the chamber to survey,
 And in a corner sees three vases stand ;
The first of silver and the second grey,
 The third of purple, like the dim-seen land
 Whose distant heights above the waves expand,
When the bright cohorts of the golden king
Burst through the ranks of night's bewildered
 band.
And from the first, twin stalks of ivy spring
That to a heart-shaped trellis closely cling.

The second vase a fragrant myrtle shows,
A vigorous plant with leaves of vivid green ;
And from the third an amaranth arose
Whose foliage glistened with a lustrous sheen.
Then wondering at the plants so strangely seen,
Adimo feels the impulse o'er him steal,
And burning to discover what they mean,
Urges his kindly hostess to reveal
If aught of mystery the shrubs conceal.

"The ivy, with its leaves with moisture wet
Clinging around the heart," the dame replies,
"Speaks of the memories that linger yet ;
Sprung from the soil that buried love supplies,
The tender shoots of recollection rise,
Their tendrils watered by our frequent tears ;
The myrtle of the present and its sighs ;
The amaranth recalls the hopes and fears,
Undying heralds of the unborn years."

She ceased, and Adimo, as in a dream,
Plucks from the ivy plant a withered leaf,
And as he severs it, his senses seem
To swim enveloped in a mist-like wreath,
His bosom bursting with impassioned grief ;
And with a sense of mingled joy and pain,
Disquiet blending with a strange relief,
He seems transported from the fairy plain
And sadly haunting well-known spots again.

He leans upon a gate, the moon's pale light
Shines sadly down upon the quiet street ;
Across the way, against the dusky night,
His eyes a group of giant poplars greet,
Whose moonlit shadows o'er the pathway meet.
He enters in ; all light and life is fled—
He hears no rippling laugh or merry feet.
"She is not here ; I will go hence," he said ;
"My love is with the unforgotten dead."

He turns away, and with an aching heart
Bends his sad steps toward the waterside,
Where, from the street a little way apart,
A mighty river rolls its rapid tide
In murky streams amid its channel wide.
He sought his boat, and as in days of yore,
His oars upon the well-known waters plied.
Well known and loved, those waters nevermore
Shall bear the merry hearts that once they bore.

Beside the stream an old cathedral stands,
Reared by the pious hands of early days,
When other races roamed the neighbouring lands,
Where herds of tameless cattle loved to graze ;
And all around the wanderer's eye surveys
The quiet dwelling-place of them that rest,
Their long march ended o'er earth's stony ways ;
'Neath the plain mound or monumental crest,
Alike they slumber on their mother's breast.

He leaves his boat upon the river shore
And sadly enters in the still retreat,
His fancy dwelling on the days of yore
When life was joyous with ambitions sweet,
Now buried, like the dead around his feet,
And with his heart by sorrow overswept,
He lays him down upon a rustic seat,
Where oft perchance some mourning mother wept
For her who 'neath the neighbouring hillock slept.

But as he muses on his bygone dreams,
A wondrous vision checks his fancy's flight,
For all around the quiet churchyard teems
With moving spirits clad in raiments bright,
That gleam like silver in the moonbeam's light.
He softly murmurs, "Spirits of the blest,
Is there not one can give my heart delight?"
And feels, with peaceful rapture in his breast,
A tiny hand upon his shoulder rest.

The vision fades, and Adimo once more
Awakens from his dreams of vanished days,
That dreams and only dreams to men restore,
And aided by the fire-light's flickering blaze,
The smiling features of the dame surveys.
About her eyes, that flash with pitying tears,
A light begot of Love's compassion plays,
And chiming with his thoughts of other years,
Her plaintive song falls sweetly on his ears :

"Why do ye weep? Go, lay her gently down
To slumber on the earth's protecting breast.
Her toil is ended; she hath won the crown
Of happiness and everlasting rest."

Why do ye weep? No winter frost or snows
Disturb the changeless spring on Zion's crest,
Where, fanned by heavenly winds, our lily blows
Beneath the shade of Sharon's mystic rose.

"Ah, happy ones! whose buds the winds of grief
Shall vex no more as in this world of ours,
Whose stainless purity and fleckless leaf
Were counted worthy of celestial bowers.
In death ye conquered death; a mightier one
Hath rescued from the blight earth's fairest
flowers.

They blossom round His throne, their triumph
won,
And He shall be to them their noonday sun."

The singer nestles softly at her side,
Filled with a consciousness of perfect rest,
That deepens till the soothing strains subside;
The dame with loving eyes beholds her guest
And folds him gently to her pitying breast,
Soothing his sorrows with a mother's care,
Her tender hands upon his forehead pressed,
And as her fingers smooth his flowing hair,
"Poor child!" she gently murmurs, "Why despair?"

"The virgin soil by shares of sorrow ploughed
Shall glow more glorious, crowned with golden ears ;
Though mournful memory, like a gloomy cloud,
Laden to bursting with its pent-up tears,
Obscures the light that shone on vanished years,
Another day shall dawn ; another light
Dispel the gathering mists of griefs and fears ;
Joy follow sorrow as the dawn the night,
And troubled anguish yield to still delight."

In peaceful calm, until the dawn of day,
Adimo lingers in the dame's retreat,
Assenting when his hostess bids him stay,
Nor haste his self-set wanderings to complete,
Till rest had soothed his travel-blistered feet ;
And roaming round the room with childish glee,
Stays to inhale the myrtle's fragrance sweet ;
Then stooping, in a thoughtless moment, he
Severs a sprig from off the parent tree.

The humble cottage into mist subsides ;
He seems to stand within a lofty hall,
With arms and trophies hanging on its sides
On which the streaming sunlight seems to fall,
Flinging a dazzling radiance over all ;
And by the glowing hearth, with eyes that rove
With eager gaze towards the portal tall,
Watches the maiden of the marble grove
As tender maidens watch for him they love.



A step resounds along the outer hall,
And like a graceful fawn the maiden flies,
And at the threshold meets Sir Percival,
With loving welcome flashing from her eyes
Like golden rays from cloudless azure skies.
"Welcome, my knight," she cries ; "these lordly towers
Seem dark without the light thy love supplies.
Steal from thy chivalry a few short hours
And deign to linger in thy lady's bowers."

She takes the crested helmet from his brow,
And from his breast removes the shining steel ;
Then kneeling down upon a foolstool low,
Of gilded spur divests his knightly heel,
And sets before her lord his evening meal,
And chattering the while in winsome glee,
"Ere called away, you promised to reveal
How, at the instance of some friendly tree,
You smote the Ash and set the singer free."

"The youth," replied the knight, "whose welling song
Twice freed my lady from the mystic spell—
Would that his strains to his content were strong,
And in their glamour potent to expel
The pride and fear that in his bosom dwell ;
His sorrows merit well your pitying tear—
Fain would I see, because I love him well,
Some nobler light dispel the clouds of fear,
And loftier dreams his troubled spirits cheer.

"But to my tale. When, by the Beechen Maid
Urged to his rescue through the silent wood,
I sought with eager steps the gloomy glade,
Where like a stunted shape the Ash tree stood,
Forth from its scabbard flew my falchion good
Against the knotty trunk, but all in vain,
The rugged bark its trusty edge withstood.
I seized my axe and smote with might and main,
Whose clang the echoing hills renewed again.

"But as I hewed, from out a coppice came
A corpse-like form that set my blood a-thrill,
Vexing my vision with its spectral frame ;
And as I awe-struck gazed, a sudden chill
Seemed the pulsations of my heart to still.
Vain with unearthly beings to contend.
Such was my thought, but the undaunted will
Can speed the blow, and right and courage tend
The doubtful issue to a glorious end.

"Stirred by new hopes, against the horrid trunk
I bade my battle axe descend again,
And as it cleft the tree, the monster shrunk
Back to the thicket, falling paces twain,
Writhing and twisting like a snake in pain.
Cheered by his pangs, swift as the lightning's flash,
My blows continued on the trunk to rain,
Nor did they cease until, with shrieking crash,
Prone on the mosses fell the hideous Ash.

"Then, resting on my axe, I gazed around
And sought the spectral tenant everywhere.
I wandered through the copse but nothing found ;
The fearful form so lately standing there
Seemed to have vanished into tenuous air.
Whether, indeed, the ghastly shape had been
Blent in the fate of its misshapen lair,
I know not ; but from then till now, I ween,
No mortal eye the hideous Ash hath seen."

His story told, "Poor youth," the lady sighed ;
"Thine arms are scarce more potent than his song."
"I fear," replied the knight, "thou lov'st him still."
"Nay, nay, my lord," she cried ; "thou dost me wrong.
To thee the first-fruits of my heart belong ;
Yet, when beneath the marble veil concealed,
His strains twice freed me from the death-like thong,
And shall I not, to one who loved me, yield
Gleanings of pity from Love's harvest field ?"

The knight was hushed ; then Adimo arose
And murmured in his heart, "Fair lady bright,
When in her lord's embrace my lily blows,
Would that my songs like lingering memories might
Yield to her peaceful heart a new delight,
And should her buds by ruthless griefs be pressed,
Or her sweet blossoms touched by sorrow's blight,
Then let the echoes of their strains be blessed
In bringing to her heart a sense of rest."

So spake the singer. For a little space
Nor knight nor lady breathed a single word,
But gazed in silence on the other's face.
So still they stood, it almost seemed they heard
The wishes that the dreamer's spirit stirred—
Intent as those who, when the shadows fall,
Hark to the ringing of the distant bird
That seems some long-lost memories to recall—
Then passed in silence from the lonely hall.

The dreamer woke, and waking, bitterness
Opened the floodgates of the sluice of tears.
Choking with sobs, unable to repress
The grief that, like the tide-wave on the meres,
Effaced the landmarks of the bygone years,
He sees the old dame with the tender eyes
Striving to cheer him, and anon he hears
In plaintive sweetness through the chamber rise
The murmurs of her gentle lullabies :

"Love rises lightly in the roseate dawning,
Steeping her banner in its crimson dyes,
Crowned with the splendour of the golden morning,
Proudly she marches through the glorious
skies,
Till twilight on her path its shadow throws
And floods her gleaming robe with sunset's saffron
glow.

"But ever with reflected light she lingers,
The spirit of a life long passed away,
And still, by memory stirred, she sadly fingers
The strings that echoed once the songs of
day,
Till Death's destroying sickle cleaves in twain
The lute that thrilled long since with Love's melodious
strain.

"Though through the night the strains of discord
swelling
Shall pierce the gloom with sounds of maddening
strife,
The sun of suns shall dawn, the clouds dispelling,
To wake the fairer dawn, the happier life,
Where Love, herself the guerdon and the goal,
Awaits with glorious smiles to greet the victor
soul."

Another morning dawned, another day
Filled with its sunny gleams the humble cot,
Yet still he lingered nor resumed his way,
Content to tarry in this peaceful spot,
His journey and his goal alike forgot,
And towards the amaranth turned listlessly ;
The old dame starts and bids him touch it not.
Too late, for as she speaks she weeps to see
A bud is severed from the flowerless tree.

Scarce had his fingers clasped the tender prize,
 When stays the lifeblood in his every vein;
 A blinding mist o'erpreads his awe-lazed eyes,
 And, like the slumberer bound by nightmare's chain,
 His spirit strives to free itself in vain.
 He seemed as though some vision wild and fell
 Well nigh to madness stirred his fevered brain,
 Yet what he saw when held beneath the spell
 No mortal being ever heard him tell.

He woke to life and consciousness again,
 But all was silence; not a sound awake
 The echoes of the cot; no stirring strain
 Upon the current of his sadness broke,
 No peaceful numbers to his spirit spoke.
 Such death-like silence reigned, it almost seemed
 The very wellings of his grief to choke;
 So torpid was his heart he well nigh deemed
 That in the last long sleep of death he dreamed.

At length the dame addressed him, "Thou hast dared
 To seek the mysteries of Fate to see,
 And, maddened but with folly, unprepared,
 To dive into the depths of Time's dark sea
 And stem the under-tides of days to be.
 Could not the thoughts of past and present days,
 With all their grief and gloom, suffice for thee?
 What frenzy stirred thee to dispel the haze
 That shrouds the future from thy mortal gaze?

"Now must thou leave in solitude away
And leave me here to face the end alone.
The injured Fates, whose powers our fortunes sway,
Demand that I should in my death alone
This fault of mine. Then now three birds are blown
On yonder stream, and ere the last shall sever
Must Death across this humble spot have flown.
Here I must linger till my latest hour,
But they at least can fly and 'scape his power."

"Wearied of life, long have I longed for death;
Think not I fear to gaze upon his face.
My latest kiss shall warm his icy breath,
And, folded to him in a long embrace,
My heart shall thank him for this crowning grace,
That, wrapped in deeper calm, I shall not stay
Till other creatures the thoughtless cease
That bind me closely to the bygone day
And loved and loving ones long passed away."

Touched to the core, and grieving at the pain
His thoughtless actions ceased to me so kind,
But finding all expectations vain,
At last, with sad and sorrowing mind,
His steps towards the rustic bridge inclined,
And passing swiftly o'er the rushing tide,
He saw a narrow path that seemed to wind
O'er hill and hollow to a gilly wide,
From whence it clambered up a mountain side.

Along the path with laboured steps he went,
Heedless and careless where the pathway led ;
He travelled on until the day was spent,
And o'er the eastern skies the sunset shed
Its wavering gleams of fierce and lurid red,
And as he struggles up the sloping glade,
The threatening tempest gathers o'er his head.
The summit of the mountain gained, he stayed ;
Then, turning round, the wondrous scene surveyed.

The sky is wrapped in gloom. It is the hour
When earth is wont to rest in silence deep ;
When dewy breaths exhale, and Nature's power
Sends softer breezes o'er the earth to sweep,
And fan her children in refreshing sleep.
But now the gathering clouds the earth conceal ;
Forth from their depths the jagged lightnings leap ;
Mountain and valley seem to rock and reel,
Their bases shaken by the thunders' peal.

Fiercer and stronger swells the roaring gale ;
Deeper and darker yet the storm-clouds lower ;
Headlong across the storm-wrapped skies they sail,
Cloud with cloud clashing ; with tempestuous power
Their hidden torrents from the heavens shower,
The deluge spreading over vale and plain.
So wild the scene, it seemed for one brief hour
Did earth and sky the unequal strife maintain,
And primal Chaos rule the world again.

Through storm and rain the singer struggles on,
Until he sees a fitful glimmering light
That through the darkness like a meteor shone,
And hails the welcome signal with delight
That speaks of shelter from the coming night.
Brighter it grows, until, against the skies,
Its casements with a mystic radiance bright,
An old, half-ruined castle greets his eyes,
Whose towers dimly through the darkness rise.

He enters through the hingeless gate ; within,
He sees a hallway with a winding stair,
And, as with weariness his senses spin,
Towards him lightly come three maidens fair,
Their girdles covered by their flowing hair.
"Welcome, our brother ; long have we," they cried,
"Waited until it pleased thee to repair
O'er fairy vale and fen to seek our side,
To bring the promised aid so long denied.

"But thou art weary, and the stormy night
Hath filled thy soul with longings for repose.
Come to thy chamber then, where slumbers light
With softer powers shall thine eyelids close,
And in thy dreams forget thy journey's woes.
But know, sir singer, when the dawning day
Across thy room its golden shadows throw,
We bid you rise and to our ears display
Why thou so long hast lingered on thy way."

They lead the way, and Adimo, amazed,
Follows obèdient to the maids' command,
Wrapped in astonishment like one half-dazed,
Too tired to question why this lovely band
Such welcome yield a stranger to their land.
His chamber reached, where all in order seems,
As though for some expected guest to stand,
The maidens leave the singer to his dreams
Until the sunshine through his lattice streams.

But waking with the dawn, he hastens down
The maidens seen the previous night to find,
And through a court with tangled weeds o'ergrown,
He sees a narrow path that seems to wind
An avenue of stately oaks behind.
He follows on and 'mid the thicket sees
An arbour where the maids he sought reclined,
Where twining creepers and o'ershadowing trees
A natural shelter formed from every breeze.

So fair they seem, he tarries to behold.
Their graceful white-robed forms, as each one lies
With tresses gleaming with a lustrous gold,
And silken lashes shading dreamy eyes,
That seem to pierce the secret of the skies
And gaze into the infinite beyond,
And gazing, learn the secrets of the wise,
When life is pitiful and love too fond
To live in hope while hopeless hearts despond.

But while he stands, the elder maid descried
 And smiling bade young Adimo draw nigh
 And rest among the mosses at their side ;
 And as he lingers there, his fancies fly
 To her he loved so well in days gone by,
 Until the maidens, eager for his tale,

Checking his musings, bid him answer why,
 Unarmed and lonely, over fen and dale,
 He roamed so far within the fairy vale.

But when he spoke of Eglantine, they smiled,
 And when his tale was done, the younger said,
 "It seems, indeed, that Fortune hath beguiled
 Or some directing power thy footsteps led,
 To free the captive and avenge the dead.
 We also mourn the loss of one most dear,
 A father whom, since seven years have fled,
 Our eyes have not beheld, nor may we cheer
 His failing years, nor of his welfare hear.

"For know, our sire was king of all this land,
 And known and loved for many leagues around,
 Honoured and cherished by his knightly band ;
 In him the simple hind that tilled the ground
 At once a sovereign and a father found.
 His country flourished 'neath his fostering care,
 And Ama was through Fairyland renowned,
 For every errant knight that lingered there
 Its glories would to other regions bear.

"But one unhappy day a giant came,
Mighty and ruthless, slaying everywhere.
He marred its walls with devastating flame,
But most, as captives to his distant lair,
He loved the noblest of our land to bear.
Knight after knight, and band succeeding band,
~~In valiant conflict did to meet him dare,~~
But dire their fate ; none could his power withstand,
Compelled to yield or fall beneath his hand.

"Our valiant sire, though far advanced in years,
Stricken with anguish for his country's woes,
And moved by pity for his subjects' tears,
Deemed it his kingly duty to oppose
His aged lance against his country's foes.
He sallied forth, but all in vain ; his power
Was early spent beneath the giant's blows,
And he himself borne captive to the tower
Which crowns the crags that in the distance lower.

"And since that fatal day for friendly aid
My sisters and myself have ceaseless wrought,
And many a knight has at our prayer essayed
The task of rescue with such dangers fraught,
And with the foe in doughty battle fought.
Useless their efforts, though their hearts were steel'd
As often as they met the foe they sought ;
Some to his prowess were compelled to yield
And others slumber on the battlefield.

"Some four years since, a knight of noble line,
 And one of royal Arthur's valiant band,
 Wandered this way, his name Sir Eglantine,
 Who wooed and won my sister Fieda's hand,
 But ere he claimed it, swore to save our land
 And free the captive sire she loved so well.
 Futile his hope the giant to withstand ;
 Beneath the ponderous mace he senseless fell,
 And shares since then our father's prison cell.

"Scarce two succeeding moons have ris'n and waned
 Since Gawain and Geraint, from Arthur's court,
 Came to this castle and for days remained,
 Before we learned the name of him they sought
 Or what stern task these warriors hither brought ;
 But when they heard his fate, they bravely dared
 The combat, as it were some knightly sport ;
 Stoutly and bravely fought but evil fared,
 And equal fortune with thy brother shared.

"Spera's betrothed, Prince Ortegal, essayed
 The dangerous peril and his freedom lost,
 And I, despairing of all human aid,
 Seeing my sisters, drooping, mourn the lost,
 Like flowers blighted by an early frost,
 Hearing there lived hard by a woman wise,
 Resolved to seek her. Yonder height I crossed
 And found an aged crone with wondrous eyes
 Whose depths seemed deeper than autumnal skies.

"I told my tale ; she listened to the end,
Smiling the while my drooping heart to cheer,
And then replied, ' Poor child, you need a friend.
Be brave and patient ; one e'en now draws near,
Who from your heart the clouds of grief shall clear.
No warrior he ; in warlike deeds untried ;
Yet shall he be to you a brother dear
And from his cell your father's footsteps guide,
And bring their lovers to your sisters' side.

"Unskilled in arms, but powerful in song,
With aimless steps, as yet, he travels slow
Towards this spot, but as he roams along,
His glances notice all things, high or low,
And this shall aid him when he meets the foe.
Gaze in this water and behold him now,
So when he comes you may the stranger know !'
I gazed and marked a boat, and in her bow
I saw you sitting with o'erclouded brow."

She ceased her tale and smiled ; then Spera spoke,
"Cara has told thee our unhappy plight,
But spared to tell how thine arrival woke
Within her heart a transport of delight,
And how she claims thee as her own true knight.
But be that as thou wilt, we bid thee stay
And fashion for thyself some armour light—
Our ancient armourer shall show the way—
To make thee ready for the coming fray."

Then Fieda spoke : "Remain and be our guest ;
Although we offer thee but simple fare,
Our loving-welcome shall supply the rest,
Decking with love the board that else seemed bare,
And make our brother's needs our special care.
Though little else we own, our store contains
Metal of proof and many a weapon fair ;
For retinue, of all our father's trains,
Our ancient armourer alone remains."

To save the brother whom he held so dear,
And somewhat swayed by Cara's tender charms,
But most the old dame's wishes to revere,
Adimo vowed to quell his heart's alarms
And meet the mighty conqueror in arms.
And as the youthful four their steps retraced,
They gazed in sadness on neglected farms,
Where weeds and depredation had effaced
The fertile fields that once their country graced.

Saddest of sights, where once the golden corn
And tender herbage from the tillage sprang,
And peaceful peasants toiled from eve to morn,
Toiled in content and 'mid their toiling sang,
While wood and valley with their laughter rang.
But now, how changed ; where once the columns grey
Of smoke against the skies were wont to hang,
No chimneys rise, and mute the watchdog's bay—
Country and homestead wrapped in one decay.

Saddest of sights ; but sadder still the scene
When grief-swept hearts the desolation share,
And sorrow broods on pleasures that have been,
When sky and earth and everything seemed fair,
And joy and sunshine shimmered everywhere.
Though drear and desert seems the wasted plain,
Drearer the hearts by sorrow's winds swept bare.
Some fostering hands may till those fields again ;
Those hearts must evermore the scars retain.

And so he stayed ; the weeks flew swiftly by,
So filled was he with pleasure and delight.
Each morn he laboured 'neath the armourer's eye
To fashion for himself some armour light,
Or tempered in the forge some weapon bright ;
And standing near him in the ruddy glow,
While crimson sparks around her winged their flight,
Would Cara laugh and sing the while, as though
She gloried in the skill of Adimo.

His toiling ended for the day, he flung
His sledge aside and would with Cara roam.
She showed him where the ringdove watched her
young,
And where the soaring eagle made its home,
Or glittering trout lay floating in the foam,
And where the violet hid, and trained his eye
To mark the insect stirring in the loam,
So, as they daily roamed, they might descry
New life, and nothing pass unheeded by.

Then racing home at eve, their supper done,
They sought the court, and Adimo essayed
To tilt the quintain, and a course well run
Was viewed with triumph by the smiling maid,
Who watched his many failures undismayed.
But ere two weeks had passed, the singer grew
So expert from the frequent efforts made,
So swift in motion, that his aim so true
Brought him in safety the adventure through.

So sped the days, until one sunny morn,
While still they lingered at their early meal,
In rushed the armourer with features worn,
That seemed fierce lines of anger to reveal,
Mingled with terror for his ladies' weal.
"To arms!" he cried, "Even now the all-conquering
foe

Draws nigh the castle, armed from head to heel,
And bearing in his arms the mace whose blow
Laid Ama's king, my noble master, low."

No need of further words ; the singer springs
Up from his seat ; the timid maidens rise,
While Cara in alarm about him clings,
And, nestled to his bosom, softly cries.
Spera to fetch his armour swiftly flies.
Soon they equip him ; Cara's tender hand
Fastens the glittering sword about his thighs ;
Then with a kiss she bids him bravely stand
Against the foe and free her native land.

And so he sallied forth, but not of her
The singer ponders as he threads the grove,
For sadder themes than love his bosom stir.
Thoughts of the dame whose eyes, so full of love,
Through him were quenched in death, his memories
move,
And filled with stern resolve he seeks the foe,
For her dear sake his manhood to approve,
Fulfil her will and lay the tyrant low,
Or die endeavouring to atone her woe.

Beyond the grove there stretched a grassy dell,
And as he gazed, the giant he espied,
With upreared body stretching many an ell,
Advancing o'er the sward with ponderous stride,
Unchecked by lofty hedge or streamlet wide,
Who, deeming Adimo another knight,
As those who had before his power defied,
Fated to fall a victim to his might,
Boldly advances to the unequal fight.

Not so the singer ; as with mighty force,
The giant's mace comes crashing through the air,
Adimo stays not in its downward course,
But nimbly leaps aside, all unaware
As yet how best he may the battle bear.
Again the mace is raised—again descends—
The singer, doubling like a coursed hare,
Such agitation to the giant lends
That thwarts his aim and serves the singer's ends.

Blow after blow disturbs the peaceful ground,
Ever evaded, but with watchful eyes,
Adimo marks the giant turning round,
And soon the singer's piercing glance describes
That, as he lifts his arm, beneath there lies
A spot, where back and breastplate loosely meet,
And as he swings his weapon, open flies.
Though but a moment seen, those glances fleet
Lent lighter motion to his flying feet.

He bides his time with heedful eye, and when
He sees the spot again, he rushes in,
Seizing the dangerous chance presented, then
His falchion thrust through vest and ox-like skin
Deep to the hilt. The sanguine tide within
Bursts in a torrent forth ; the giant made
One bound and bellowed. Frighted by the din,
Fast in the tyrant's side he left the blade,
Rejoiced with life the danger to evade.

Roaring with rage, the giant rushes on,
But faint with loss of blood, a futile fray
He ceaseless wages, till, his strength outdone,
Breathless and baulked of his expected prey,
His staggering steps all further efforts stay.
Amazed with weakness, as he turned to flee,
His legs sank under him and there he lay
Prone on the grasses, like a fallen tree
Whose mighty trunk is stretched across the lea.

Adimo, as he fell, without delay

Bestrid the giant and his sword regained.

The blade that lately in the beams of day

Had shone with such a brightness, now was stained

With lifeblood from the freeman's bosom drained.

He waved the dripping steel above his head ;

Spurred by resolve, his arm fresh vigour gained ;

Twice through the air the crimsoned weapon sped,

Then from the giant's body smote the head.

The armourer, whom age forbade the fray,

Stationed the while upon a neighbouring height—

Whence, safe from harm, he could the field survey,

With straining eyes had watched the unequal fight,

And hailed the tyrant's fall with wild delight—

Now rushing on the scene, a blood-stained key,

Hid 'neath the giant's breastplate, brings to light,

Crying the while, " Sir Champion, haste with me

To set the king, my noble master, free."

Eager those captives should unfettered be,

Adimo bade the old man lead the way,

And swiftly traversing the spreading lea,

Though worn with strife, their footsteps knew no
stay

Till sunset heralded the close of day.

Then resting for a while beside a rill

That leapt from crag to crag in clouds of spray,

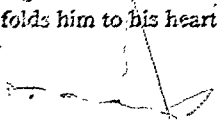
Their limbs refreshed, and having drunk their fill,

Renewed their task and scaled the rugged hill.

The summit gained, they saw a castle stand
With towering walls and battlements of stone,
That seemed to frown upon the wasted land,
As though, from an impenetrable throne,
Its master sought to rule the world alone.
The armourer hastened on ; the brazen lock
Yields to the key ; the gate wide open thrown
Displays a donjon, reared from many a block
Of granite riven from the stubborn rock.

The entrance gained, through many a gloomy cell
They sought the captives where no piercing ray
Of sun or moonlight glory ever fell.
Groans shocked their ears, as speeding on their way
They reached the dungeon where the captives lay ;
Back flew the bolts, but what a wretched crowd
Before them stood ; some prematurely grey,
Others that seemed awaiting but their shroud,
And scarce had strength to breathe their thanks aloud.

To Ama's king the ancient armourer flew,
And, wild with gladness, kissed his master's hand,
Then bending down, the shackles' bolt withdrew
And wept with joy to see his monarch stand,
Freed and restored to Ama's sorrowing land.
But Adimo paused for a little space,
Seeking his brother in that wretched band ;
Spying at last the well remembered face,
He folds him to his heart with warm embrace.



"Is this my brother?" cried Sir Eglantine ;

"The wayward stripling now become a man,
Who, in my leisure hours, was wont to twine
Around the form his arms could scarcely span,
And loved with eager eyes my face to scan,
While I related tales of Arthur's court ?

Can this be he that frees us from the ban
Of dread captivity? I little thought
The bud would blossom in such noble sort."

His brother freed, Prince Ortegael he sought,
And loosed the chains from Geraint and Gawain,
And many a noble knight, who scarce had thought
To look upon the golden sun again,
Or roam in freedom o'er the breeze-swept plain.
Joy fills their hearts, and all with loud acclaim
Rejoice, delivered from the oppressive chain.
Eager they seek the youthful victor's name,
And high as heaven extol the singer's fame.

That night they lingered in the giant's halls,
And with the morning homeward went their way ;
With joyous shout they passed the gloomy walls,
But come the mandate of their king obey,
And to destroy their prison-place delay ;
Full soon with eager zeal they light a pyre,
Whose flames are seen from mountains far away,
Gaining in brightness, ever leaping higher,
Till distant vales behold the beacon fire.

Roused by the vivid glare, from every side
Gather an eager crowd the news to learn,
And when their aged monarch they descried,
With gleeful songs they hail their king's return
And gladly mark the tyrant's stronghold burn ;
And as the monarch's castle they draw nigh,
The giant's headless trunk the crowd discern.
Frantic with joy they raise the triumph cry
And shouts of " Adimo ! " disturb the sky.

The three fair daughters of the aged king,
Who long had waited tidings of the fray,
Now hear the din, and hasten, wondering,
To greet the glad procession on its way,
And strew the conqueror's path with leaves of bay.
The sire and daughters meet ; oh, joyful sight !
Spera to Ortegál then turns away ;
Fieda and Eglantine, in glad delight,
Their troth once more in loving whispers plight.

The castle gained, the festal board they spread,
And gave to mirth and revelry the night,
And whispered words to witching glances led,
And smiles to love, and love to new delight,
But when the merriment had reached its height,
The monarch called the singer to his side
And bade him kneel, then with his falchion bright
His shoulder smote ; " Sir Adimo," he cried,
" Rise ; and may chivalry thy footsteps guide."

O'erjoyed at such an unexpected bliss,
While Cara buckled on the spurs of gold,
He lightly stooped her maiden brow to kiss,
And as she blushed, he marvelled to behold
What tales of love those treacherous eyelids told,
And longed his arms around her heart to close,
But something seemed his fondness to withhold,
As though the old dame of the cottage rose
Between them, their hearts' blending to oppose.

The night sped on apace ; each wearied guest
His chamber sought, and soon in slumber sound
The wearied revellers had sunk to rest.
Soft sleep her mantle round the castle wound,
And wrapped the earth in stillness profound ;
But when the darkest night had cast its shade
Of peaceful quietness the world around,
Adimo, dreaming, roamed the forest glade,
Seeking with gloomy heart the Marble Maid.

And then he seemed to leave the bygone hours,
And with the old dame of the cottage roam
A garden decked with amaranthine flowers,
From off whose shining stems the winds of dread
Strove all in vain a single leaf to shed,
And saw a streamlet from a rocky cell
Dash, gaily singing as it onward sped,
And as it rushed into the verdant dell,
His spirit heard the song and felt its spell.

The Plain

III

"Awake, arise, the moments fly ;
The world is not for dreams of love,
And sterner thoughts must strength supply
To manlier deeds the mind to move,
And those who would life's joys partake
Must heed life's call ; arise, awake !

"The breath of peace, the smile of glory ;
Deem ye such joys were meant for him,
Whose life is but a listless story
Of years with languid efforts dim ?
Ever again the glass is shaken ;
Cling not to love and its fleeting dreams.
Courage can higher hopes awaken,
And life is fraught with nobler themes.

"Awake, arise, the stars shine bright,
The moonbeams dance on every tree.
Not for themselves they live in light,
But that the world may brighter be.
Spurn self aside ; ere morning break,
At duty's call, arise, awake !

"Though love have her charm, there are charms far
stronger
Can gladden life's night into endless day.
The sweetness of love may be briefer or longer ;
Its bitterness lingers and clings always.

The life with the world in communion blended
That lives for its fellows is more sublime.
Its course shall be calm, and — its bright span
ended—
Shall shine as a star in the vault of time.

“Awake, arise, for duty’s call
Still speaks of work for men to do.
E’en now the mists of darkness fall,
And falser teachings veil the true.
Spurn doubt aside, through error break,
At duty’s call, arise, awake !”

The morning dawns ; with joyous acclamation
And shouts of merriment of gladness born,
All things are ordered for the celebration
Of Fieda’s and of Spera’s wedding morn.
The maiden’s lute is heard, the huntsman’s horn
Rings gaily out the echoing hills around,
Startling the rabbit crouching ’neath the thorn,
And stirs the timid fawn, with rapid bound,
To seek in haste some less frequented ground.

When all things were prepared, the monarch cried
For Adimo, and to the singer said,
“To-day thy brother claims a loving bride ;
Fieda by him will to Love’s shrine be led,

And Spera to Prince Ortegál be wed ;
 And as I sought some recompense for thee,
 I marked the love by thee on Carà shed ;
 By her returned. Though dear indeed to me,
 Yet Carà, if thou wilt, thy bride shall be."

"Nay, sire," cried Adimo, "for Fate ordains
 The stream of life must flow o'er stony cares.
 For her my heart a wealth of love contains
 Such as a brother for a sister bears,
 Who mourns with him his grief, his pleasure shares.
 Never can I be glad in mortal bride
 Or seek from maiden aught but pitying prayers
 For me, while still our souls asunder wide
 The dark abysses of the past divide.

"The time may come, if not on earth, in heaven,
 When weary hearts have rest and throb no more,
 And errors are atoned and sins forgiven,
 That love may waken on that sunlit shore
 To joyous blossom, fairer than of yore.
 Nor love nor present joys can chain me fast,
 For Duty calls, and, beckoning on before,
 Bids me my life on stormy waters cast,
 And seek in toiling to atone the past."

Then said the king, "Not as a man thou sayest,
 But e'en as they whom God's commands inspire,
 And, like the prophets of the past, essayest
 To warm our spirits with celestial fire,

And lead our hearts from earth to themes far higher.
Depart in peace, since thou wilt have it so,
And Heaven grant thee every good desire."
And Cara kissed his brow and murmured low,
In tremulous accents, "Go, my loved one, go!"

CANTO IV

THE PLAIN



CANTO IV

THE PLAIN

THERE is a sadness when the setting sun
Sinks slowly downward in the western skies,
When through a veil, of crimson vapours spun,
The glistening summits of the mountains rise
With chasms girt where snow eternal lies.
The sun, whose radiance all the day has blest
The fruitful earth, behind the mountains dies,
Smiles but a moment on each lofty crest,
Then sinks and leaves the earth to night and rest.

The tawny rabbit, crouching in the brake,
In lonely grief seems motionless to lie;
The white swans resting on the purple lake,
Stilled by the mournful scene, forget to fly,
And, sorrowing, seem to watch the daylight die;
And as the dusky clouds unite to draw
A sombre curtain o'er the arching sky,
All things seem hushed by some mysterious law,
And earth itself is veiled in silent awe.

But sadder still are partings, when we sever
From friends we never more may meet again,
From friends whose memories will linger ever,
And fill our bosoms with a yearning pain
For those lost hours we never may regain.
The hours are long between the dusk and dawning ;
Though one by one new planets rise and wane,
And myriad stars appear, the skies adorning,
We lack the sun ; when shall we see the morning ?

Such sadness stirred the singer as he parted
From those he loved in Ama's ruined towers,
And Cara wept, and well-nigh broken-hearted,
She lingered with him in the vine-clad bowers,
Where erst they spent in joy their idle hours.
In sadness now, familiar haunts they view
And pass unheeded by the fragrant flowers,
And hand in hand, although their words were few,
For hours they lingered loth to say adieu.

But parting came at last, and once again
Through Fairyland the youth resumes his way.
Sir Eglantine and Ortegai had fain
Been his companions, but he said them nay
And bade them with their new-won brides delay.
The monarch blessed him ; then, with accents slow,
Addressed him, saying, " Duty's call obey.
Though I would keep thee, yet I bid thee go
And conquer destiny, Sir Adimo."

He waved his hand, and forth the armourer brought,
Richly caparisoned, a noble steed,
Whose graceful arching neck and stately tread
And sinewy limbs bespoke that noble breed,
Unmatched in tameless strength and wind-like speed.
The singer, dreading weakness to display,
Determined on his journey to proceed,
Murmured farewell, then, fearing more delay,
With many a glance cast backward, rode away.

For many days he journeyed as of yore
Through green-clad glen and flower-besprinkled vale,
With saddened heart but sterner than before;
Although with sorrow and privations pale,
He checked his grief nor let his courage fail.
But one noon, as he rested on a knoll,
His wearied limbs fanned by the summer gale,
The calm of self-content across him stole
And comfort and elateness filled his soul.

He proudly thought upon his late won glory—
His gilded spurs, and how he overcame
In fight the giant—deeming that in story
His deeds would be remembered, and his name
Brightly emblazoned on the scroll of fame,
Until the earth itself should pass away.
So musing, he remounted, and the flame
Of pride within him swelling all the day,
Tinted his thoughts and made his musings gay.

So journeying on, he came a-nigh a wood,
Just as the shades of night began to close
Around the earth, and as he musing stood
Scanning the path, a mounted knight arose
As though the singer's passage to oppose.
As he drew near, his visor, opened wide,
Features like those of Adimo disclose ;
His arms like those to Adimo supplied,
And twin-like seem the chargers they bestride.

Amazed, astounded, Adimo beheld
His very counterpart before his eyes.
Then pausing for a space by awe compelled,
Strives not to check the terrors that arise
Within his breast, but turns his rein and flies.
But all in vain ; his second self pursues.
The chase is short. No vaunted pride supplies
Strength to resist, when feeble hearts refuse
To guard the liberty they dread to lose.

The strange knight hales the singer to the ground,
And so beset he yields without a blow.
Stripped of his arms and to his saddle bound,
The singer, dazed with unexpected woe,
Lies in the power of his remorseless foe,
Who rudely grasps his captive's bridle-rein
And leads him through the wood with paces slow,
As though by lingering to enhance the pain
Fears for his fate made Adimo sustain.

Beyond the coppice stretched an open plain
Whereon there stood a tower old and grey,
Its gaping roof the sport of wind and rain,
Whose walls, untenanted for many a day,
Were scarred with signs of ruin and decay.
There from his horse the unpitying victor springs
And drags the helpless Adimo away,
And in a gloomy cell his victim flings,
Where nestle toads and other slimy things.

And there he left him ; but each following day,
With stagnant water and bread blue with mould,
He sought the dungeon where the captive lay
And mocked and jeered him till that gruesome hold
Seemed worse than hell, and grief and suffering told
Upon the singer, till his sunken frame
Was worn as those long vexed in fever's fold ;
His limbs refused their office and became
As feeble as the limbs of men born lame.

His heart was numbed with gloom and silence dread,
But one day, through the stone-paved passage ringing,
He heard the footfall of a lighter tread
Than was his tyrant's, and a child's voice singing,
Blent with the whirr as of a bird low winging,
And as he listened seemed to know the voice
That through the gloom such melody was flinging.
Its burden was of peace, and quaint and choice
The carol seemed that made his heart rejoice.

"O creature of love! O fair, faint dove! thou hast
wandered all day.

Thy wings are weary, the dusk grows dreary, thy
wanderings stay.

Lo! daylight flees and the tops of the trees chill
night winds shake.

Then hasten to rest on my heart's warm nest till
morning break.

"The sunset glory on mountains hoary hath glimmered
and died,

And now on their courses, 'mid cloud-clad forces, the
bright stars ride.

The moon, her minion, o'er Night's dominion, its
radiance flings,

And earth grows cold; then hasten to fold thy way-
ward wings.

"When Morning beaming, with pennons streaming
across the sky,

Pitched his pavilion, with gold and vermillion adorned,
on high,

'Mid lances slender, radiant in splendour, I watched
thy flight,

Thy white wings glancing o'er cloud-wreaths dancing
in crimson light.

"The storm leaped forth from his home in the north
with sonorous sound,

And as it travelled the dark clouds ravelled the earth
around;

'Mid lightnings flashing and thunders crashing with
dissonant roar,
Peaceful and frail, in the face of the gale, I watched
thee soar.

"Thou badest the breeze o'er the wind-stirred trees its
blustering cease ;
To the murmuring waves 'mid the rock-bound caves,
thou hast whispered of peace ;
And Ocean smiled like a guileless child, and its foaming
crest,
Stilled at the sight of thy plumage bright, sank calm
to rest.

"The storm passed o'er and I watched thee soar from
earth to the height,
And in thy winging, the bright spray flinging from
pinions white,
In lustrous rays with splendour ablaze, till men
cried, 'Lo !
The angel of light o'er the arching height is spreading
his bow.'

"O'er land and deep the night winds sweep and the
flowerets one by one
In leafy beds have hidden their heads to wait for the
dawning sun ;
And shalt thou still o'er valley and hill unresting roam.
Then tarry awhile till morning smile, this heart thy
home."

The singer ceased, and at his prison door
Adimo heard again a fluttering wing
Beating against the panels, and once more
Some eager hand the chains asunder fling
And open wide the creaking barriers swing.
A bird flies in, in whom the singer knew
The thrush who first inspired his soul to sing,
And following her, the boy—to ease whose woes—
He once had struggled in the whirlpool's throes.

Whilst with a warbling strain of glad delight
The songster nestled on the singer's hand,
The boy stood marvelling at his piteous plight,
Gazing as though he scarce could understand
Or words to clothe his wonderment command.
At last he spoke, "O, friend, once kind to me,
How happens it that in this peaceful land
A knight so noble and so good I see
Enchained by Self and garbed in misery?"

"Little I fancied when, with querulous cries
Of importunity and fluttering wing,
This nestling thrush, with piteous, pleading eyes,
Seemed to implore my aid, that following
She would my footsteps to thy dungeon bring;
And so I find thee, not as in my dreams
I oft have seen thee, fortune-conquering
And nearing to the goal where ever gleams
The glorious morn of Truth's celestial beams.

"I knew thee frail of form, but strength avails
Little indeed unless the heart be strong.
Weakness may pass where force to enter fails ;
Firmness and courage to the heart belong
That burns to help the helpless, or the wrong
Of injured loved ones loveth to assuage,
And, armed with consciousness of right, prevails,
Nor fears at tyranny to fling its gage,
And laughs to scorn the despot's futile rage.

"Fain would I free thee for my rescued glass,
But thy enfeebled frame and limbs appear
Scarce strong enough beyond thy cell to pass,
And ere thy path to liberty is clear,
The foe must be subdued who holds thee here,
Guarding with jealous eye the outer gate.
Meanwhile I may afford thee better cheer,
And, lingering near thee, patiently await
Till thou be strong enough to meet thy fate."

He brought him food and wine, and day by day
Returned again when night was drawing near,
While the sweet-throated thrush, with many a lay
And spirit-soothing strain, his soul would cheer,
Enlivening with her song the dungeon drear ;
And every day the tyrant would depart,
Marvelling that treatment harsh and words austere,
Bristling with all the stings hate can impart,
Had not sufficed to break the captive's heart.

Many the song the sweet-voiced warbler sang,
And every evening through that gloomy cell
Those mystic melodies unceasing rang
And calmed the singer with their soothing spell.
And as the harmonies arose and fell,
Adimo heard the fierce, tempestuous gale,
With roaring blast, sweep down the peaceful dell ;
Then gentler zephyrs lightly kissed the trees
And whispered softly to the murmuring seas.

And still those songs of plaintive sweetness rise.
She sings of one, on that far eastern strand
Where the sweet bulbul warbles to the skies,
Whose joy it was to wander o'er the land
On deeds of mercy bent, with unarmed hand,
Seeking the wicked from their ways to move,
Consoling those whom misery had banned,
Leading their thoughts from earth to things above,
From sin and guiltiness to truth and love.

She sings how once, at noontide overcome
By heat and weariness, the prophet sleeps
Until the sun had sunk in heaven's dome
And o'er the earth the moon her station keeps,
And the sad night wind through the jungle creeps,
When deafening roars the silent woods awake,
And through the brush a giant tiger leaps,
So vast his bulk, his footsteps seem to make
The very earth beneath their pressure quake.

"Servant of good," the furious tiger cried,
As o'er the prophet, in the moonlight pale,
He crouched with bloody fangs dilated wide,
"Can all thy prayers or love of man avail
To save thee now when might and manhood fail?
That heart of thine that hatred never knew
Shall in thy death-pangs hate for me assail."
Then pitying tears the prophet's cheeks bedew,
And low he cries, "Poor beast, I love thee, too."

Even as he spake, an awe-inspiring change
Of wondrous kind the monster underwent.
He writhed and turned as though by spasms strange
His frame was stirred, and when his strength was
spent
Convulsions fierce his mighty body rent.
Then from his bosom soared a spotless dove,
Whose carol with the murmuring breezes blent,
"Love hath a power all other powers above,
And might and guiltiness must yield to love."

The days sped on apace, the singer grew
Stronger and stronger, and his limbs regained
Their wonted vigour, and his heart more true
With nobler passions beat, by pangs sustained
To lowliness and self-oblivion trained.
Then the bright boy cried, "Nothing now delays.
Rise! tread the path by destiny ordained
With fearless spirit through life's tangled maze,
And Truth shall light thy way through Error's haze."

He brought his armour from a roofless shed,
Where many a week before, in mute disdain,
The foe had hurled the arms of him who fled.
Now tarnished was the steel with many a stain,
Through long exposure to the wind and rain.
Adimo grieved as he beheld their plight ;
His eyes could scarce the welling tears restrain,
Then slowly said, "To arms have I no right
Who am not worthy to be called a knight."

He took the spurs, the signs of chivalry,
Gazing upon them as in mute appeal,
Then with his lips he touched them reverently,
Thinking of her who first upon his heel,
With tender hands, had bound the gilded steel.
Then to the boy he spake, "I have no share
In knightly glory now ; these arms conceal,
And, when we part, these spurs to Cara bear—
Emblems of honour that I must not wear.

"Tell her I am not worthy now to wear
These glittering emblems, or to be her knight ;
Tell her, I ask her prayers that I may bear
Myself with nobler mien and walk aright
Through life's dark labyrinths, my love, my light ;
And then, perchance, if constant be my aim
To shun the evil and maintain the right,
When deeds of love have blotted out my shame,
I may behold her and these spurs reclaim."

So saying, he left the gloomy cell and sped
With hasty steps along the corridor,
The ruined walls re-echoing to his tread.
Roused by the sound across the stone-clad floor,
His gaoler hastens to the castle door,
Armed with his mace, and Adimo espying,
Though much astounded, deeming as before
The singer would his safety seek in flying,
Rushes to meet him, on his strength relying.

But Adimo stands fast, and as his mace
The foeman swings, guided by glances true,
He shuns the blow, and, stepping back a pace,
Drives his sharp sword the heavy timber through,
Whose keen edge cleaves the deadly mace in two.
Seeing himself disarmed, the helpless foe,
Daring the strife no further, turned and flew,
Pausing but for a moment to bestow
One glance of baffled spite on Adimo.

"Waste not thy hours in following," cried the boy ;
"Spend not thy strength, for he is harmless, save
To him who finds in Self his only joy,
With sullen spirit, gloomy as the grave,
Content to be unto itself a slave.
Thy pathway lies through yonder verdant mead,
And nigh yon lake, where blue marsh flowerets wave,
In the fair pasture wilt thou find thy steed,
While I to Ama with thy message speed."

He pressed the singer's hand ; the sweet-voiced bird ,
Flew to the heart of Adimo again,
And then, as though by pent emotion stirred,
Burst forth in one low, long, melodious strain
That seemed to melt in sadness o'er the plain.
" Farewell," she cried ; " unto thyself be true,
And peaceful fearlessness shall aye sustain
Thy spirit, and the land thou wanderest through
Be to thy heart a paradise. Adieu ! "

And so they parted, each his separate way ;
Adimo seeks the pasture land where grazes
His gentle charger, who, with whinnying neigh,
Obeys his master's well-known voice and raises
His form recumbent from the crushed down daisies.
He mounts and o'er the spreading plain they sweep,
Nor slack their speed till checked by twilight's hazes
That swiftly o'er the blue horizon creep
Ere light is lost amid the shadowy deep.

And as he rides along, the moonbeams shimmer
And planets sparkle in the clear frore sky,
And myriad stars with crystal lustre glimmer
In the dim distant heavens, and far on high
A veil of luminous purple passes by,
In radiant paleness waning—now more bright,
Bristling with rays that through the deep vaults fly,
Spreading across the bosom of the night
Streamers aglow with many coloured light.

And as the singer watched them dance, he deemed
Those streaming lights the scintillating wings
Of angel forces whose effulgence streamed ;
Some dyed with crimson from the dawning's springs,
Others with radiance borrowed from the rings
Of glistening rainbows ; some with plumage spun
From the pale moonbeams, earth o'ershadowing,
That evil things their radiant smiles may shun
And leave her peaceful till the night be done.

And meteorlike those brilliant streamers fly
Over the arching heavens, spreading wide
In lambent lines of flame, as though they try,
In every quarter where deceit may hide,
To thrust the guilt-concealing gloom aside.
Their searches done, to quainter shapes they change,
And, ever-flashing, sway from side to side,
Bursting at last in myriad parts that range
O'er space in forms fantastical and strange.

But as he gazed across the purple plain,
With armour flashing in the radiance, rode
A shining form on whom the shifting train
Of ever-changing streamers danced and glowed,
And the pale moonbeams round his helmet flowed.
Mirrored upon his breast a star was lying
Peaceful and still ; the charger he bestrode
Was white as snow amid the valleys lying
When woods are bare and wintry breezes sighing.

Swiftly he rode, and when he nearer drew,
Halted his steed upon the spreading plain.
His well remembered form the singer knew,
And with a sense of pleasure blent with pain
He gazes on Sir Percival again,
Who, as he marked him hesitate awhile,
Deemed that some shame his greeting did restrain,
Yet knowing that his heart was free from guile,
Beckoned him to him with a cheering smile.

"Poor Adimo," he cried ; "why doubting stand ?
If thou hast roamed in darkness, so have I,
And few there are who journey through this land,
Where Envy, Discontent and Malice try
To tempt the heart to sin and misery,
But have so wandered ; but their baneful might
May check but cannot stay the hearts that try
Bravely to pierce the all-pervading night
That shrouds our pathway to the dawning light.

"Yet as we journey on, the shadows flee,
Then through the mist the sun of gladness breaks,
The sweet-voiced song-bird carols in the tree,
And lingering Echo with the morning wakes,
While gentle breezes stir the limpid lakes,
Where sunrise flecks with gold the milk-white spume ;
The butterfly his gaudy plumage shakes,
Basking in gladness who hath known the gloom
That long oppressed him in his chrysal tomb."

He ceased, and Adimo, with outstretched hands,
Murmurs his gladness ; and the livelong night,
Like two fond brothers who, in distant lands,
Have long been parted by the laggard flight
Of time, and meet again with warm delight,
They conversed till the gleam of morning broke;
And sunrise filled the earth with tender light.
Then in the heart of Adimo awoke
A newborn sense of peace, and thus he spoke :

“O Percival ! if thou, a stainless knight,
Canst pity one debased by many a stain,
Whose wavering heart hath wandered from the right,
And wilt not shun my presence nor disdain
To let me ever by thy side remain,
Let me go with thee as thy squire, and lo !
Warmed in thy sun my life shall flower amain.
Where'er thou goest would I also go
And share with thee thy pleasure and thy woe.”

Percival paused awhile and then replying,
“I fain would have thee, yet I may not know
Whether 'twere best for thee, but I, relying
That the good God will order all things so
They may enhance thy weal nor work thy woe,
Bid thee come with me, which more readily
I do, believing that strange insights show
Visions and thus thou knowest what by me
Is now concealed through fear of grieving thee.

So they rode on together o'er the plain,
By sheltering groves among whose branches
 played
Soft summer breezes, and by fields of grain
 Waving in gladness as each fruitful blade
 Raised its crowned head in golden robes arrayed,
By sloping hills on which the sunbeams throng,
 Casting dark shadows on the bright green glade,
And glorying in the morn they rode along,
Adimo pouring forth his thoughts in song.

“Softly the dreamland fairies
 Of fancy come and go,
Like shadows on the prairies
 When the lingering sun is low,
And from the Past's dim distance
 Loved voices haunt me yet,
For time lends no assistance
 To teach me to forget.

“By day and night I hear them,
 In sleeping or in waking,
When dawning's light on the snow-clad height
 With lustrous flush is breaking.
By day and night I hear them,
 When sleep the heart is shrouding,
And fancy teems with joyous dreams
 Of love that knows no clouding.

"The breezes of affection
Sweep down the vale of woe ;
The leaves of recollection
Are rustled to and fro,
And memory softly straying
Life's budding boughs among,
On harps Æolian playing,
Awakes their low, sad song.

"By day and night I feel them,
In toiling or in leisure ;
At their behests unbidden guests
Throng in the halls of pleasure.
By day and night they haunt me
Like spectral forms of woe,
Warnings that as the past has flown,
The present joy must go.

"Though sad their forms and strong their powers,
I would not wish them less,
They link me to the bygone hours
Of love and happiness ;
To future years they stretch their strand,
When love and I again
May roam the prairies hand in hand
And never more be twain."

Then they ride on in silence, but the past
Holds Adimo in thrall and hides from him

The beauties of the landscape ; thick and fast
The surging memories through his fancy swim.
They haze his thoughts and make his senses
dim,

He feels indeed as one who sleepless tosses
On downy couch made hard by sorrows grim,
And mourning, stumbling, bears again his crosses,
Gleaning new griefs from brooding o'er past losses.

But gentle Percival observed with pain
The gathering clouds upon the singer's brow,
And thus addressed his friend with kindly strain,
"The harvest of past years is garnered now
Beyond recall ; to-day is ours to plough
And sow the seed, so that the future day
Shall yield us for our toil reward enow.
We cannot, let us mourn them as we may,
Vary the records of a bygone day.

"'Tis true that none of earthly mould can bid
The buried memories return no more,
But linger in their graves forever hid ;
Or could not, if he would, seal up the store
Of treasured thoughts of days that are no more.
But wherefore count past efforts all in vain ?
Although the edifice commenced of yore
Is ruined now, some stones must still remain
To form foundations for a nobler fane.

"Should man bewail that his Arsinoë
Some other Nicias hath wooed and won?
Perchance there yet may in his future be
Another nobler and a fairer one,
And he, with wisdom dearly bought, may shun
The shoal that wrecked him, if, indeed, his life
Was marred as was the Grecian's who denied
His lady's whim, and lost a plighted wife,
Who sold herself to be another's bride
For dainty lions, furry and grey-eyed.

"Blest was he in the loss ; but Love is blind,
And unrequited, spends itself in tears.
Yet is he any happier who can find,
On looking back into the depths of years,
That Death, and Death alone, with cruel shears
Hath rent the robe of love that clothed his heart?
But doubtless He who sits above the spheres,
Who is all wisdom, deemed it best to part
Their lives, for He alone controls Death's dart.

"Alas ! how few there are who recognize
How great the gain of such a loss may be !
The loved one, now transplanted to the skies,
In heavenly purity awaiting thee,
Beckons thee upward, urging thee to free
Thy soul from earthly taint and follow her.
Yea, by the grace of Heaven even she
May be thy guardian spirit when passions stir
Thy heart, and to thy mourning minister.

"What though as exiles from our native home,
Through untilled wastes and deserts bleak and bare,
Sighing the while, with heavy hearts we roam.


If rightly sought for, Love lurks everywhere,
And all is lovely if we deem it fair.

The sun that dances on our crests the while
Ripens the fruit our native orchards bear.
The self-same stars that on the prairies smile
Gaze nightly down upon our native isle.

"The breeze that sweeps down yonder snow-girt valley
Has freely-wanton'd on the flowery lea,
And borne its fragrance through the crowded alley
And o'er the restless ocean wandered free,
Sucking salt savours from the surging sea.
The clouds that gather round the horned moon
Have hovered o'er the land we long to see!
Why then complain? Alas! the joys of June
Are loathsome when the heart is out of tune.

"Then be it ours through Nature's wilderness,
Where none by fate have heretofore been led,
With hearts elate and joyful steps to press,
Tracking new paths for other men to tread,
That children yet unborn may learn to bless
The feet that led the way to happiness.

That men may follow, we must track the plain,
Nor must the knowledge make our toiling less
That they, not we, shall reap; our children gain
The fruitful harvest of the exiles' pain.

"Though life be fraught with mingled joy and sadness,
With mirth and melody, with moans and pain,
The pangs of grief give greater zest to gladness ;
Grief's tares make brighter Pleasure's golden grain
That gleams more glorious through the teary rain.
The bee's sweet labours would our palates cloy
Did this, and this alone, our lives sustain ;
So unmarred pleasure would destroy, 
And life, insipid, find no joy in joy."

Communing thus they rode upon their way
For many days, and nobler feelings throve
Within the singer's bosom day by day.
Longing his thankfulness and zeal to prove
In labours of humility and love,
On Percival he waited, groomed his steed,
Burnished his armour, and at night-time wove
Soft couches for him from the friendly reed,
His kind preceptor's ease his only heed.

And Percival, who noted well his mind,
Said nothing, for he deemed it best that he,
Forgetful of himself awhile, should find
The loftiness of service—learn that he
Who freely serves may full as noble be
As those on whom obedient henchmen wait ;
And he who, urged by sweet humility,
Serves in contentment, has a fairer fate
Than that which mocks the slave-girt tyrant's state.

One burning noonday, as they rode across
The meadows scorching in the sultry heat,
Resting upon a stone o'ergrown with moss,
They saw an ancient dame with weary feet,
Her shoulders bowed beneath a load of peat,
Who, gazing at the passing travellers, sighed,
And softly murmured, "Oh, to ride were sweet,
But whilst the young on gallant coursers ride,
Old legs must tread the dust with weary stride."

Sir Percival drew rein, and Adimo
Halted beside him, whilst he spake the dame,
With kindly words, "Good mother, whence thy woe?"
The dame replied, "This morning, sir, I came
In search of peat to feed my cottage flame,
And as I homeward walked, slipped on a stone.
Alas! I strained my knee, and well-nigh lame,
I cannot move a step without a moan,
Nor dare I hope to reach my home alone."

"Where is your cot?" the impulsive singer cried,
Glancing at Percival, who bowed consent.
"Scarcely a league from here," the dame replied.
Then Adimo leaped down; with reverent
And tender hand the injured dame he lent
His aid to mount his steed; one whisper fleet
To Percival, then dame and singer went
Towards her cot, and he, despite the heat,
Trudging beside her, bore her load of peat.

The way was long, but he, whose mind was stirred
 With soft compassion, recked not of the miles,
 Until in grateful tones the dame he heard
 Breathing her thanks in various gentle styles,
 Her wearied face aglow with radiant smiles,
 And then he saw a cottage, creeper-clad,
 Clean swept from threshold to the tawny tiles ;
 Cheerful and neat it seemed, as though it had
 A mistress who was in her cottage glad.

The fuel stacked beside the cottage door,
 Into her cot the dame the singer led.
 He marvelled at the room, whose white-tiled floor
 Shone bright and lustrous with reflections red
 That from the wide and lofty hearth were shed ;
 Its mantle marble, carved with curious care,
 The walls were mirror-panelled, each in frame
 Of burnished gold ; whilst every stool and chair
 Was rosewood, gold-inlaid, and polished fair.

The dame observed his eyes in wonder roam,
 So softly said, " Full many a kindly hand
 And heart like thine hath glorified my home.
 Kind deeds make all things beautiful and grand,
 Creating monuments of worth to stand
 Beacons for future years. My rooms are filled
 With furniture enriched by Love's own wand,
 For loving words of sympathy can gild
 And glorify the walls kind actions build.

"Yet let me now, sir singer, ere we part—
For kind deeds never unrewarded go,
And yours was kindness springing from the heart—
This ancient amulet on you bestow,
Set with a stone whose iridescent glow
Flashes in hues of many coloured rays
Shot from its wounded heart, that men may know
The chasms rent by grief can brightly blaze
With vivid flames to bless life's after days."

The singer took the gem and thanked the dame
With kindly words, then musing left the cot,
Mounted his horse, retraced the road he came,
In search of Percival. The day was hot ;
The sun was high up in the skies and not
A cloud o'ershadowed him ; so, downward springing,
To save his horse he sought a sheltered spot.
This found, the reins around some branches flinging,
He whiled the time and freed his thoughts in singing.

"In the distant realms of ether
Pierced by seraph song,
Round the Pleiads grouped together,
Constellations throng,
Ever moving, ever ranging,
Round that central sun ;
Changeless while all else is changing,
Bright ruling one.

"There they say a spirit dwelleth
 In the mystic zone,
 With a light that all-excelleth,
 Circling round his throne,
 Round his throne of radiant brightness
 Where, himself the sun,
 Sits he veiled in lustrous whiteness,
 Bright ruling one.

"Rays of golden glory gleaming,
 That around it rise,
 Through abysmal space outstreaming,
 All imparadise.
 Making life itself more glorious,
 Love's triumphant sun,
 Shines, o'er depths of sin victorious,
 Bright ruling one.

"Ambient rays of glory flowing
 Round the heart entwined,
 Till our mortal essence glowing
 With a love divine,
 Love divine and pure descended
 From that fountain sun
 Love illumed with love is blended,
 Bright ruling one."

Awhile he lingered till the noonday glare
 Somewhat abated, then once more he sped

To join Sir Percival, resolved to share
His lot and follow where his fortune led,
Determined in his chivalrous path to tread,
Content as squire to linger at his side,
Warmed by the halo truth and courage shed,
For well he knew that none could better guide
His wayward footsteps from the path of pride.

And as through narrow lanes and meadows green
With cheerful heart the singer lightly rode,
The sunlight filled the world with golden sheen,
And luminous upon his bosom glowed
The jewel by the kindly dame bestowed,
Flashes of ruby, green and blue diffusing.
Well might sharp grief the Roman's breast corrode ;
Bitter the pang he must have felt in choosing
A life in exile or such jewel losing.

He marks the leafy boughs where songsters dwell,
Brilliant as dawning in their varied hues ;
He passes sloping banks of asphodel,
Their flowers still sparkling with the morning
dews,
The lilac hedges whose sweet breaths suffuse
The ambient air, and through a leafy grove
He hears the carol of a linnet swell ;
Earth, sky and nature all conspire to prove
To every mortal sense the power of love.

For love or kindness, term it which you will,
Rules earth and sea and sky with magic wand.
No matter where or when, its spirit still
Leads like a star to realms unparagoned,
Unfolds the portals of the bright beyond,
Or smites the rugged rock that men at will
May from its fountains drink without disparity.
It hews a path for Hope when men despond,
And even Faith, on earth the greatest rarity,
Is fanned to being by the breath of Charity.

Such thoughts as these engaged him till again
He nears the spot where Percival had stayed,
Awaiting his returning on the plain,
Who, growing anxious as his friend delayed,
For twilight now upon the prairies played
In fitful shadows, and one lonely star
Already in the gloam the skies displayed,
Fearing lest aught the singer's life should mar,
With heart relieved, perceives him from afar.

Rising, he greets him with a warm embrace,
Then leads him to the margin of a pool
Whereby his charger grazed, a sheltered place,
'Mid rolling hills, by holy-grass kept cool ;
There seated with a hummock for a stool,
The singer to the knight his tale declared.

This done, pursuant to his daily rule,
Watered the horses ; then the comrades shared
The evening meal by Adimo prepared.

The stars were shining brightly, and the moon
With silver light illumed the spreading plain.
So at Sir Percival's suggestion soon
Their onward journey they resumed again,
Proceeding side by side with loose-held rein.
Then spake Sir Percival, "To-day I slept.
The languor stilled my body, but the brain
Was active still, and quick responding leapt
To greet the visions that across it swept.

"I dreamed a dream and it was wondrous fair,
But what its full intent I cannot say ;
And yet methought I heard a voice declare,
'Fierce are the flames that line the fiery way
Which severs the divine from mortal clay.
No soul untempered by Love's fervent heat
Can safely pass through night to endless day,
Or scatheless from the furnace seek to beat
In calm eternal at its Maker's feet.'

"I thought the skies were parted and there came
From gates which shone resplendent in my view
A spirit robed in glory, winged with flame,
That like a radiant meteor swiftly flew
In dazzling splendour o'er the arching blue ;
And as she hovered o'er me clear and free,
Rang out the call that thrilled me through and through
'Spirit, who would the unveiled vision see,
The fetters burst, and rising, follow me.'

“And then, impelled by an intense desire,
My soul awakes, responsive to the call,
And scorched as if by some consuming fire,
Struggles to burst in twain the earthen wall
That holds it pent ; ere long the fetters fall,
Molten by longing's strong intensity ;
Naught can withstand its fierceness ; soon are all
The barriers burned, and then impetuously
Soars at the spirit's summons, ' Follow me ! '

“Far over earth it soared, and soon the clouds
On high enveloped it, but still it rose,
Its vision circumscribed by vaporous shrouds
That seemed to struggle in chaotic throes
The adventurous soul more firmly to enclose.
Yet still it followed, gliding presently
Downward to regions where the wild wind blows,
Whence, mingling with the sighing of the sea,
Rang out the spirit's summons, ' Follow me ! '

“And presently the sky was overcast ;
Across the clouds the vivid lightnings flashed ;
The air was shattered by a piercing blast ;
Around the earth the rolling thunders crashed,
And furious billows on the headlands dashed.
But all was darkness, save when fire-sheets shone
With bright intensity, but unabashed,
The soul proceeded where its guide had gone,
Obedient to the summons, ' Follow on ! '

“Again arising, leaving earth behind,
Away into the infinite beyond,
Where eddying suns in ceaseless cycles wind
Through shoreless seas of space, companioned
By lustrous orbs in light caparisoned,
In chords melodious moving, and anon
Through regions yet by mortal eye unconned,
Their voices in harmonious unison,
Blended with that sweet whisper, ‘Follow on!’

“And then afar I saw a ball of fire
Whose lambent streamers constantly outflung,
Soared into space, as though they would aspire
To rend the veil of vapour round it hung,
And pierce the gloomy void with searching tongue,
And yet the soul, though stirred by scorching thrill,
Still to the wake of that bright spirit clung,
Obeying with indomitable will
The call that rang so clearly, ‘Follow still!’

“Faster and faster flying, soon it neared
The molten orb, until the fiery gush
Enwrapped the tender essence; scorched and seared,
It sought the centre with a sudden rush;
One thrill of pain and then its throbbings hush.
Its agonies are stilled by some sweet balm;
Angelic robes against it softly brush,
And then, enveloped in a restful calm,
It softly nestles in the spirit’s palm.

'Then as the quickened soul regained its powers,
 The curtains of the Infinite unrolled.
 A city stands revealed with graceful towers
 Translucent as the crystal, bright as gold ;
 Its dainty spires their tracery unfold
 Like starry flowers that in frost-time grow,
 Engirt with walls of lustre manifold,
 And rising toward the centre, row on row,
 Its stately palaces like jewels glow,

" And in its gateway stood a radiant throng.
 Yet one there seemed the leader of the band,
 Supreme in brightness those bright forms among
 Who wait all jubilant His least command ;
 Something He held in His enhaloed hand
 My soul but dimly saw as through a veil,
 Yet saw enough to sorrowing understand,
 Though all else stood revealed, the Holy Grail
 Was shrouded from the vision of the frail.

" And as I gazed a glorious being came
 In buoyant flight across the ether's flow,
 Whose soft approaching was with loud acclaim
 Greeted by those who waited there, and, lo !
 Its features were as thine are, Adimo !
 Then spake the brightest one, ' We welcome thee
 Who gavest all, that men the truth might know.
 Receive the cup ; drink of My blood and be
 As are the angels, ever one with Me.'

"Then all at once a darkness seemed to rise
That wrapped in wreathing mists the wandering soul,
Hiding the blessed vision from its eyes ;
And, like the seaman stranded on a shoal
When entering the port, his longed-for goal,
Who viewed in helplessness the waves that broke
Around the bark he could no more control,
So felt my soul, till its attendant spoke,
' Hope on, for help is nigh ; ' and I awoke."

His story told, in silence for a space
They travelled on, each wrapped in quiet thought,
Yet ever and anon the tranquil face
Of Percival was stirred as though he fought
With some emotion, but the singer sought
The lesson that the vision strove to teach ;
And as he mused, its meaning clearly caught.
Nor speak they till their halting-place they reach,
Then laid them down, " Good-night," their only speech.

Next morning, rising whilst the diamond dew
Is still upon the emerald sward a-glow,
Across the plains their journey they pursue,
While suntime's early shadows to and fro
Are softly moving through the shrubs that grow
On either side the trail, whose odorous scent
Is borne upon the winds that lightly blow,
And urged by Percival, as on they went,
The singer's carols with the breezes blent.

“The waves sweep lightly across the oceans,
 And gossamer clouds through the nebulous sky,
 Yet swifter and lighter the fleeting emotions
 That float on the breath of the Maid Urvasi ;
 Fragile as foam-wreaths that gather and break
 On the tremulous breast of the crystalline
 lake,
 They eddy and circle with soft commotions,
 At the touch of the dawning to vanish and die.

“For these are the fairylike sensitive flowers
 That bloom in the fugitive gardens of Sleep,
 Ephemeral fancies, begotten in hours
 When Nature rests silent and slumber is deep.
 Time hath no measure and space is spanned
 When the delicate buds of the night expand
 Their filmy petals with subtle powers,
 The heart compelling to sing or weep.

“Soft is the glow of those gardens gleaming
 With glory borrowed from bygone days,
 From tender memories moonlike streaming
 In silvery light through a luminous haze ;
 The sinuous paths that about them pass
 And the beautiful lawns of the Dreamland
 grass
 With shadowy figures and shapes are teeming,
 That traverse in silence their mystic maze.

"And borne on the air comes a delicate sweetness,
And glammers of perfume around them soar,
When hearts long severed, in love's completeness,
In those bright bowers are met once more.

Spirit to spirit and face to face

They are linked again in that beautiful place,
To wander a while in their joy's repleteness,
As oft they wandered in days of yore."

"Surely," cried Percival, "they touch the heart,
Our minds enthralling with delicious themes,
And spirits that have drifted far apart

Are reunited in the land of Dreams.

Wrong, sorrow, suffering, all forgotten seems—
The cloudlike dream on wings of fancy borne
With soothing showers the parched-up heart re-
deems;

The veil that screens the sanctuary stands withdrawn,
And thence outstreams the flood of Hope's bright
dawn."

Anon they saw a hill with slopes embrowned

That from the prairie sharply seemed to rise,
Its summit with a stately castle crowned

That dimly rose against the distant skies.

This Percival, who searched with eager eyes,
Did first perceive, and to the singer cried,

"Behold, yon keep that in the distance lies
Is now my dwelling-place where I abide
When I may linger with my late-won bride.

“There shall I bid thee welcome, and perchance
Thy heart in gladness once again may greet
A long-lost friend whose presence may enhance
The pleasure of thy sojourn ; for 'tis sweet
'Midst strangers some familiar face to greet,
And more so when the face is that of one
Whose joy thou hast assisted to complete,
And thus the claim to bask hath rightly won
In those warm rays that flow from friendship's sun.”

The singer gazed across the prairies wide,
His bosom troubled as with sudden pain :
His trembling heart too well the truth descried.
Strive as he might for courage, 'twas in vain ;
He feared to meet the Marble Maid again.
The wound reopened by the sudden blow
Caused tears to gush that he could scarce restrain ;
Fierce was the struggle as he answered, “No ;
As yet into your home I dare not go.

“But rather let me, whilst you there remain,
Reposing from your toils with heart elate,
Seek some sequestered shelter on the plain
Where I in peace may patiently await
Till duty call you from your castle gate.
Then when your lance is once more laid in rest,
Let me rejoin and strive to emulate
Your bright example and with you be blest
In righting wrong or succouring those oppress.”

In accents soft Sir Percival replied,

“I feared thine answer and no further press,
And let thee freely for thyself decide ;

Thy happiness I seek, not thy distress,
And in my halls, if aught of bitterness
Should vex thy breast or cause thy heart a tear,
Our grief would equal thine, but ne’ertheless,
If part we must, in parting know no fear ;
Short is my stay, I may not linger here.

“Behind the hill there runs a little creek

That passes through a leafy wilderness ;
There stands a cot where thou mayest shelter seek,
Its mistress one who glories to express
In hospitality, her tenderness.

There mayest thou dwell in peace as in a tomb,
Nor fear my lingering will thine heart oppress.
Ere seven suns have sunk in twilight’s gloom,
I will rejoin thee and our quests resume.”

The night is brooding o’er the silent earth,

The stars arising in the cloudless sky,
The land is hushed, for not a sound has birth
Upon the prairies that around them lie,
Nor yet the nightbirds have commenced to fly,
Or wandering prowlers from their dens to dart ;
The very breezes sound no lullaby
To still the throbbings of the beating heart,
When, hands long clasping, knight and singer part.

CANTO V

THE VALLEY



CANTO V

THE VALLEY

THUS far upon the fairy land of life
With wayward steps my hero wends his way,
Through regions where ambitious dreams are rife,
Yet stronger hearted growing day by day,
No longer do his footsteps idly stray ;
With manlier purpose more controlling fate,
More heedful lest some slip his life betray,
As those must walk who taste the joys that wait
The victors passing through the further gate.

For only those who strive with strong intent,
With single aim and undiscouraged soul,
Both heart and brain in common purpose blent,
Can conquer Fortune and asunder roll
The rocks that bar to faltering hands the goal.
This as I deem the lesson oft displayed
Within the confines of the old-time scroll
That bears the legend of the youth who made
His sword from fragments of his father's blade.

His was the strong indomitable will

Welded the sword when others strove in vain,
And his the stern resolve more potent still

That bade the smitten anvil part in twain,
And his the fearless heart resolved to gain
The dragon-guarded prize,—but what avail

Are these digressions—let me once again
Resume the even tenour of my tale
And track its wanderings through the fairy vale.

Silent, with thought o'erburdened, Adimo

Pursues with drooping heart his way alone
Along a little creek whose ripples flow

With gentle murmurs over sand and stone,
Its banks by weeping willows overgrown,
Whose trailing shadows in the glow of night
Across the waters of the stream are thrown,
But short the road ere he, with heart more light,
Perceives the spot depicted by the knight.

Beside the creek he found a little wood

Of sturdy oaks and shady sycamores ;
Within its depths a dainty cottage stood,
Stone-walled, red-tiled, with curious carved doors,
Their panels studded with the winged spores
Which softly from the parent tree distrained,
Like birds in autumn float across the moors ;
Its narrow casements, arched and diamond-paned,
Were filled with glasses blue and crimson stained.

His summons heard, the door was opened wide,
And as its portals noiselessly expand,
The singer, filled with wonderment, descried
A graceful maiden on the threshold stand,
Enrobed in white, a taper in her hand,
A star of silver shining on her breast,
Who bids him enter, and at her demand
His wish to linger there the youth expressed,
Sent by Sir Percival to be their guest.

And as she stood there, with the moon's pale light
Shedding its glory on her neck and wrist,
Like some enhaloed seraph pure and white,
The rays that pierced the casement lightly kissed
And swathed her form in hues of amethyst,
Lighting the star that on her breast did lie,
Till Adimo, enraptured, scarcely wist
If she were mortal or as those who fly
When Dawn's first blush proclaims that day is nigh.

She called her mother ; at her call appeared
A mild-faced dame attired in silv'ry grey,
Whose hair, like snowdrifts on the mountains reared
Shining and sparkling on a sunny day,
Crowned her fair forehead with a shimmering spray ;
In tender dreaminess her eyes displayed
The depths of sympathy that in them lay ;
Calmly she listened whilst the graceful maid
Disclosed why Adimo his journey stayed.

But scarcely was the brief-told story ended,
Than, mindful of the warm and kindly rite
Of hospitality, with hand extended,
She greets the singer with a welcome bright
That sets his bosom dancing in delight.
She bids him in their home contented rest,
A wanderer most welcome, since the knight,
Sir Percival, whose name she freely blest,
Wished him to tarry for a while their guest.

A room there was within that still retreat,
A cosy resting-place, though garnished plain,
Inviting slumber, and the perfume sweet
Wafted from creepers round the window pane
Soothed every weary sense and stilled the brain
To calm contentment. There the kindly dame
Left Adimo to slumber, and amain
To lull his surging thoughts oblivion came
And Nature nursed in sleep his toil-worn frame.

But brief his slumber, for with morn's first beams
Once more he wakens strengthened by repose,
And blithely marking how the dawning streams
Through the hinged casement, from his couch arose ;
Finding the door unbarred he swiftly goes
Adown the path which 'midst the coppice lies,
While yet the first faint streak of dawning glows
Upon the summits of the hills that rise
Where the horizon cleaves the eastern skies.

To walk the meadows when the breath of dawn
Is laden yet with vapours of the night,
To breathe the freshness of the glowing morn
That mellows all the earth with tender light
And sets the pulse athrob with new delight,
Say, is there aught by which mankind is stirred
To such a gladness, or a fairer sight
Than Day's new birth, when from the woodland heard
Rings the first carol of the sweet-voiced bird?

Its glory with a thousand colours fills
The purple arches of the hazy sky,
Shedding a crimson splendour on the rills
That seem to murmur louder, rushing by,
Their wavelets decked in Morning's pageantry,
Until the glorious sun its crest uprears,
Gilding the peaks, and Dawn's first shadows lie
Upon the sloping cornfields where the tears
Of night still linger on the golden ears.

Or when across the vast expanse of sea,
When winds are calm and billows scarcely play,
The fringing cloud-banks brighten on our lee,
A roseate flush o'erspreads the gloomy grey,
Tinging the wat'ry waste, as we survey
The crimsoned ripples plashing on our strake,
Then from the ocean soars the god of day;
The billows round our bow in glory break,
In golden furrows streaming from our wake.

The ocean's purple turns to sapphire hue,
Its foam-wreaths flashing in the glorious light,
The skies are mantled with a brighter blue
And clouds across the waters wing their flight
Like floating gossamer of silvery white,
The sparkling waves their radiant crests unfold,
Rolling along in more majestic might,
And gazing on our spars our eyes behold
The lofty mastheads tipped with gleaming gold.

And as the singer gazed, he saw afar,
Beside the margin of a reed-fringed mere,
The white-robed maiden of the silver star,
Who, wrapped in meditation, seemed to peer
Into the bosom of the waters clear,
As though she sought to read some secret olden
In those dim depths where nothing is asteer,
Beneath the shade of lilies white and golden
That float amid their heart-shaped leaves enfolden.

He sought her side, and as she swiftly turned,
Warned by his footfalls in the ferny brake,
Long ere he reached the pool, the maid discerned
The singer's form, and left the limpid lake,
Springing to meet him, her bright eyes awake
With radiant smiles of welcome, that confessed
More warmly than the modest words she spake,
Her gladness at the coming of her guest
And joy in his companionship confessed.

She took his hand ; they wandered lightly down
O'er grassy slopes and meadows diamond-sprent,
And fallow fields whose robes of ruddy brown
Gleamed with new glory by the morning lent,
Then lingered for a while in calm content
Within a glen, a still sequestered spot,
From whence a little rill its waters sent,
Tumbling and tossing, from a rocky grot,
Through sapphire beds of marsh forget-me-not.

They rested there until the sun was high,
In converse sweet, for each of them was young,
While mirthful laugh to laugh made glad reply,
And each in turn in wrapt attention hung
On words that rippled from the other's tongue.
The youth once more his wanderings recalls ;
The maiden marvelled as the singer sung
Of woodland denizens and marble halls,
Of Cara and of Ama's ruined walls.

She told him that the valley's children kneeled
To Nature and her glorious sign, the sun,
And she with them, till Percival revealed
The story of the God-begotten one,
Who, dying, endless life for mortals won ;
Since when her mother and herself had bowed
In worship only unto Mary's Son,
Rejoicing in that tree whose glorious load
Such priceless blessings on mankind bestowed.

Then they returned, and as they neared the cot,
They saw amid the copse a man arrayed
In flame-hued garments, with a sable spot
Upon his breast, on which, in gold portrayed,
The figure of a serpent was displayed ;
His girdle was a golden snake, whose crest
Was richly jewelled, and the trembling maid,
Clinging in terror to the singer's breast,
In tones of anguish thus her fears expressed :

" See ! from our mother's lonely cottage goes
The Arch-priest's herald. Hateful to our sight
Is he, the dreaded messenger of those
Who rule the valley, and with sinful might
Compel obedience to their impious rite ;
A harbinger of evil, whose command
May rob our peaceful home of all delight,
For vainly should we struggle to withstand
The mandates borne upon his flame-tipped wand.

" But quicker, quicker ! let us not delay ;
Home let us hasten, for my mother dear
Will need my hand to wipe her tears away,
Her daughter's love her drooping heart to cheer
And join her strength to hers, if, as I fear,
The message speaks of ill to mine and me.
Home let us haste ; I cannot linger here,
Far from my mother's loving arms, when she,
Alone, perchance is steeped in misery."

They speed their pace and soon they reach the door,
When, torn with agony, the maid describes
Her mother kneeling on the cottage floor,
The crystal tear-drops welling from her eyes,
Her bosom heaving with the sobs that rise
In anguish from her breast. A parchment scroll,
In gules emblazoned, on the threshold lies,
And, filled with rage that he can scarce control,
The singer tramples on the ill-omened roll.

The maiden, rushing to her parent's side,
Swiftly surrounds her with a fond embrace,
Seeking in love that will not be denied
The reason why the glistening teardrops race
In streams of sorrow down her mother's face,
And on what fearful bode the herald dread
Disturbed the quiet of that peaceful place.
Then the sad dame arose with drooping head,
And struggling with her sorrow, softly said :

"Would that my tears could bring my soul relief,
Or set my bursting heart from anguish free.
Ill was the message, bitter is my grief,
And death were welcome. What is life to me
If I must severed from my daughter be,
And see her ravished from my powerless hands
To deck the rites of cursed idolatry?
For so Ahura's fell high priest commands,
And so the herald of the god demands.

"Thou knowest of their customs. Year by year
Before the Devan festival is done,
That Nature's smile may gild the ripening ear
And Plenty's blessing for the vale be won,
Three maidens of our race must wed the sun,
And with the godhead in communion blend.
Now, 'tis decreed, my child, that thou be one
Of those for whom the impious priests pretend
Such glorious honours in the skies attend.

"When for the second time the dawn shall rise
Above the mountains of the distant east,
My daughter must attend the sacrifice,
Decked as a bride to share the nuptial feast.
A bride, forsooth, but let the accursed priest,
Whose sistrum stirs the vale, the truth declare,
What fate awaits her—this is truth at least,
That those that love them nevermore behold
The maidens hidden by the veil of gold."

"And is there, then, no help?" cried Adimo.

"If prayers and pleadings are of no avail,
Could friendly force or guile avert the blow?"

"Alas!" replied the dame, "what can prevail?

No force have we that could their power assail,
Nor means to seek it, for their spies abound;

Against their cunning all our wits too frail,

And watchful sentinels our house surround

Lest we should fly where succour might be found."

She told him of the honours paid the brides,

The priestly homage, till a curtain falls

Between them and the populace, that hides

From vulgar gaze what afterward befalls

The virgin victims in those temple walls,

And more she told him of their mystic rite

Whose heathenry his Christian soul appals,

And fills his heart with longing that the light

Of truth should penetrate that Pagan night.

Long time he pondered, whilst the women wept

In silence, brooding o'er their piteous woes,

Until the shades of twilight lightly crept

Across the valley ; then the singer rose

And thus addressed the dame, "My thoughts
disclose

A way—Christ helping us—thy child to aid.

Though force be futile, guile to guile oppose.

Let me, in bridal robes and veil arrayed,

Go forth in semblance of the destined maid,

"Trusting our God may aid me to reveal

To all who in the outer precincts wait

The evil those unhallowed walls conceal

From them who linger at the temple gate.

Though this be death to me, what nobler fate

Could mark the sunset of my life's brief day?

Such ending would I gladly contemplate,

If dying thus I could to men display

The snares of Satan that their souls betray.

"And ye, perchance, when I am far away,
May with Sir Percival safe shelter find."

Then rose the dame and sadly answered, "Nay,
Thy thoughts are noble, but such thoughts forego ;
Although my heart be rended with my woe,
Yet shall a mother's love my heart entice
To let thy sufferings shield me from this blow ?
For all would be discovered and the price
Of intervention be thy sacrifice."

"In vain," cried Adimo, "you strive to turn
My purpose, for I am resolved to be
A sharer in that festival and learn
The inner secrets of the mystery
That blinds men's eyes to base idolatry,
And stand beside the brides, the priests despite,
Seeking to succour their simplicity.
If die I must, let me in death delight
That one fair life escapes their heathen rite."

Then said the dame, "The mists of even steal
Across the valley and the sombre West
Mourns for the light that earth's dark shades conceal ;
Let us our chambers seek, where prayer and rest
May teach our sorrowing hearts to know the best,
For God is merciful, His ways designed
To bless, not torture ; so, good-night, my guest,
And may we meet at morn with hearts resigned
To face the future with a calmer mind."

The good-night uttered, Adimo retires
And calm at heart, his brief devotions said,
He seeks his couch, where drowsiness inspires
The balmy rest that dreamy slumber shed
In soothing haloes round his weary head.
Not so the dame, for with her daughter kneeling,
Long time she prayed before she sought her bed,
And gentle sleep on silent wings anealing
Swept like soft odours o'er her senses stealing.

And then she dreamed that earth was all a-flood,
Its people perishing in dark despair,
Then through the gloom that o'er the world did brood
A little star shot forth, whose silvery glare
Trailed like a comet as it pierced the air,
Alighting on the waters near the tree
In whose high branches, with her daughter fair,
The dame was sheltered ; there it floated free,
Like a strong raft upon a stormy sea.

And moved, as though by some unheard command,
The dame and her sweet child with joy descried
The buoyant beams that like a boat expand
To yield them shelter from the rising tide.
Both step aboard, and as they swiftly glide
Across the waste, unurged by oar or mast,
Unhappy wretches throng on every side,
Then wider yet the gleaming rays outbrast
Till all are sheltered on its surface vast.

And when the last of those sad souls has sought
The safety of that ark, the floods abate,
The waters vanish like a fleeting thought,
And brighter grow the vaults, so dark of late,
As erst the voids of Chaos uncreate.
Then Nature, garbed in light, smiles brightly on
An earth that glories in its fair estate ;
Again the sun amid the heavens shone
And all was gladness but the star was gone.

The night is done ; the rays of dawning break
Again in glory in the silent vale
And those who in that cottage sleep, awake,
Roused from their slumber by the balmy gale
Rustling the vines that round their windows trail ;
Once more the three are met ; both dame and maid
The singer greet with faces wan and pale,
But calm and firm the looks his face displayed
And bright the smile that from his eyelids strayed.

"Art thou prepared to answer now?" he cried,
"Or halts thy mind in hesitation still?"
"I grieve but falter not," the dame replied,
"For dreams, by prayer begot, my bosom fill,
And guide my tongue to bid thee have thy will ;
For this I feel, the Providence divine
That shapes the lives of men to good or ill
Moving in thee, determines thy design
To sacrifice thyself for me and mine.

"Yet vain the hope that any earthly hand,
 Laden with succour, may in time appear ;
 Around the glade Atharvan sentries stand,
 Who, knowing of thy presence, in the fear
 That thou might rescue seek, will hover near
 Till sunset flashes on the cottage wall ;

I must attend thee, while my daughter here
 Perforce must linger, till the twilight fall
 Ere she can safely seek the knightly hall.

"But brief the time for preparation given ;
 Ere long the escort comes the bride to greet,
 To lead in triumph forth the maiden riven
 From home and dear ones, all that life holds sweet,
 From friends whose mourning knows no paraclete ;
 Then, lest their coming should our plans surprise,
 Let us, in haste, thy changed attire complete ;
 So may our wiles escape their watchful eyes,
 And all be ordered for thy enterprise."

A silken garment, radiant from the loom,
 She twines about him, so that none might trace
 A vestige of his sex ; with almond bloom
 Loops up the drapery, and o'er his face
 She throws a filmy veil of foamy lace ;
 Meantime the maid, the ill-starred cottage leaving,
 Brings snowy lilies from their reed-girt place
 And sits alone, in gloom sepulchral grieving,
 The fragrant bridal crown of lotus weaving.

And when the wreath was done, the maiden bound
About his waist a string of golden bells,
Which utter, as he moves, melodious sound,
Whose music thrills her heart-strings and compels
Some joy to light the breast where sorrow dwells,
And then, with tender hands that tremble yet,
Urged by the love that in her bosom swells,
Clasps on his breast the opal amulet
That glows with ruby, green and violet.

She scarce was done when through the glades around
The tramp of many marching feet was heard,
And at the door the kerna's notes resound.
The maiden flies, as flies the startled bird
From sylvan thickets by the hunter stirred,
But Adimo, his heart with joy elate,
Steps boldly forward at the mother's word,
And opes the door, upon whose threshold wait
The flame-robed heralds of the priest-ruled state.

Before the door there stood a palanquin
Of sandal framed, and curiously inlaid
With gold and ivory ; he enters in
And at a signal by the heralds made,
The trembling mother follows, half afraid
At venturing the pagan band among.
Then the departure is no more delayed ;
The litter is upreared and borne along
By swarthy slaves, with shoulders broad and strong.

First come, enrobed in white, a virgin band,
Their flowing locks with snowy blossoms crowned,
Laden with rose leaves, which, with lavish hand,
They scatter as they pass along the ground ;
Next come the trumpeters, whose horns resound
In strains sonorous ringing o'er the wold ;
And after them a glittering cohort wound,
Of chosen spearmen from the sacred hold,
In gorgeous garments richly decked with gold.

The heralds followed, then the priestly band,
In saffron mantles, silver-fringed, arrayed ;
The foremost bore a banner in his hand,
A golden sun on azure field displayed,
While those behind a circling phalanx made
About the litter ; last, a bright-robed throng
Of singing boys, who, when the leader bade,
Their voices lifting up in chorus strong,
Awoke the echoes with the nuptial song.

But presently, the leader, drawing near
In humble seeming, Adimo addressed .
" Fair virgin, whom the people all revere
By happy fortune shortly to be blessed,
In the warm rays of that bright God caressed,
Who sits enthroned the glorious stars among,
Thy servants long to hear thy joy expressed.
Let strains of jubilation awake thy tongue !"
The singer bowed assent, and thus he sung :

"A song of Love ! and loving, let me sing
Of Love divine that came to earth a king,
Circled with Love as with a diadem.

"A song of Love ! and of that Love's strange star,
That, brightly shining from the heights afar,
Smiled softly down on sleeping Bethlehem.

"And of that Love, by Love's clear guidance led
O'er plain and desert to the manger bed,
Where Love to loving seekers Love made known.

"The Love that, fasting in the wilderness
Or praying on the mountain, strove to bless
The hearts of men and make mankind his own.

"The Love that in the garden, hard beset,
With tears of agony and bloody sweat,
Endured such pangs as mortals never knew.

"The Love that, though in mocking robes arrayed,
Scorned and reviled, for his tormentors prayed,
'Father, forgive, they know not what they do.'

"The Love supreme, incarnate, crucified,
The Love of loves that, loving, gladly died ;
The Love that, sunlike, turned the night to day.

"The Love that, thrilled with His disciples' pain,
Returned to earth to comfort them again,
And left Love with them ere He passed away."

He ceased, and for a moment all are hushed ;
Awed and amazed, the long procession stands
In wondering silence, then it stirred and crushed
Around the litter ; with uplifted hands
And reverent voices, that great host demands
To hear again that sweet and mystic song ;
All but the priests, whose chief in vain commands
The march resumed, the impulse all too strong
That sways the minds of that delighted throng.

Amid the soldiers the Atharvans blend,
Striving the line of order to restore, —
Seeking to give to wild confusion end,
Fearing the strains whose influence they deplore,
And ere the singer could be heard, once more
The sense of discipline asserts its sway,
And once again, their hesitation o'er,
The spearmen sullenly their chiefs obey
And filled with discontentment, lead the way.

The others follow, and in silence all
That glittering line along the valley goes,
Until the shades of night began to fall
And from the lower lands the mists uprose,
Like sombre veils that would the world enclose
And shroud the beauty of its form from sight ;
Then, when the failing light could scarce disclose
Their onward way, a village rose in sight ;
This reached, they halt and linger for the night.

The goal is welcome ; they have journeyed far ;
There let them rest whilst I recall to mind
The sorrowing maiden of the silver star
In that abandoned cottage left behind,
Who, sheltered by the shades of night, designed
To seek Sir Percival's protecting arm,
Still fondly hoping succour there to find
For one, who, feeling for her heart's alarm,
Offered himself to save her soul from harm.

That night the watch-towers of Sir Percival
Beheld the coming of a noble train.
Foremost of these there rode Prince Ortegal,
With bold Geraint and chivalrous Gawain,
And close behind them, on the spreading plain,
They saw the stalwart Eglantine appear,
With gentle Cara and her sisters twain ;
A saintly father rode the maiden near,
And twenty trusty squires closed up the rear.

Since to her father's halls the kindly boy
Had brought the spurs by Adimo resigned,
Cara's lamenting heart had known no joy,
And restless discontent oppressed her mind ;
The love within her bosom's temple shrined
Inspired her thoughts, and bade the maiden go
On loving quest the sorrowing youth to find,
Her single aim to calm the storm of woe
That swept the troubled breast of Adimo.

Her sisters shared her grief, and Eglantine
Chafed like a charger by the bridle-rein
Stayed in his course, for his desires incline
To bring his wandering brother back again.
The monarch, finding other measures vain
To set his daughter's cheek again a-glow,
At last consented, with a kindly train,
That Cara in her sister's charge should go
For three brief months in search of Adimo.

Sir Percival descended with his bride
To bid them welcome ; in the castle court
He greets his friends and those who with them ride.
Meantime the castellaine, with kindly thought,
The weary ladies to a chamber brought,
The ravages of travel to repair,
And this achieved, the banquet hall they sought,
Where all united meet with joyous air
To share the meal their generous hosts prepare.

The supper ended, Percival requests
That Eglantine the object should unfold
That to his castle brought such honoured guests.
Gladly the knight the glorious story told,
How his loved brother in encounter bold
The giant vanquisher of knights had slain,
Freed Ama's monarch from the gloomy hold,
And burst the cells where Geraint and Gawain,
Himself and Ortegai, so long had lain.

[illegible][illegible]

"The Kingdom and the Kingdom
 To that the journey, and the journey
 Lay at the feet of, 'From the Kingdom of
 The Kingdom of the Kingdom, 'Is, no I know, the Kingdom
 The Kingdom of the Kingdom is the Kingdom,
 Take the with the Kingdom of the Kingdom of the Kingdom
 I may know the Kingdom of the Kingdom of the Kingdom,
 The Kingdom of the Kingdom of the Kingdom of the Kingdom
 The Kingdom of the Kingdom of the Kingdom of the Kingdom
 The Kingdom of the Kingdom of the Kingdom of the Kingdom"

'THE WINDS BLOW IN WINTER TEMPERED
 'THE MOUNTAIN WITH THE CLOUDS IN THE VALLEY,
 'THOUGH HE WAS STAGNANT AND NOT USED ANYMORE,
 'HE KNEWLY ENJOYED THE IN WINTER THE VALLEY,
 'THE WINDS BLOW, AND STAYING THE WIND WAS
 'WHEN THEY WERE THE WINDS AND WINDS WERE
 'FINDING THE WINDS IN WINTER,
 'AND WIND, WINDS, THE WINDS WERE IN WIND,
 'THE WINDS WERE WINDS WINDS WINDS WINDS,

[illegible]

"And on the top of that, my Anna is there,
 In tears with warm, warm, Catherine's arms,
 As she's waiting by the waiting room.
 With father and all the rest of us
 'I hope the family, and the whole thing
 has been made by the waiting room."
 "The whole lot of them, with Anna's eyes,
 Two other girls, and the whole lot of us
 And with the whole lot of us, and the whole lot of us."

And now they turn, the children of a young
 World by pillars, windows of the world,
 In the light of the sun, the light of the sun,
 'Till they are in the light of the sun,
 'Till they are in the light of the sun,
 And now they turn, the children of a young
 World by pillars, windows of the world,
 In the light of the sun, the light of the sun,
 'Till they are in the light of the sun,
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 World by pillars, windows of the world,
 In the light of the sun, the light of the sun,
 'Till they are in the light of the sun,
 'Till they are in the light of the sun,
 And now they turn, the children of a young
 World by pillars, windows of the world,

"By the days and nights succeeding
 One by one,
 By the moon and stars proceeding
 Round the sun,
 Stretching out our arms to reach thee,
 Throned afar amid the sky,
 We entreat thee and beseech thee,
 Hear our cry !

"Where is knowledge? But the fringe
 Of the true is in our grasp ;
 But the shadow- yet this dim age
 Holds it with an iron clasp,
 Long have we, thy children, striven,
 Scarcely knowing wrong from right ;
 All we have by thee is given,
 Give us light !

"By this earth of thy creation,
 Poked in space ;
 By the men of every nation
 On its face ;
 Falling prostrate down before thee,
 In humility we lie ;
 Thus adore thee, and implore thee,
 Hear our cry !

"Halting in the night of terror,
 Girt with darkness half our days,

Crooping through the robes of error
 For the Truth's more glorious dawn;
 Hear us then, O mighty mother!
 Bend the veil that dims our sight;
 'Thou canst aid us and none other,
 Give us light!

"By the rivers and the fountains
 Whence they flow;
 By the cloud-crowning mountains,
 Capped with snow;
 Borne in supplication lowly,
 'Thou we pour our prayers on high;
 Mother mighty! Mother holy!
 Hear our cry!"

Beyond the white periphery there shone
 A spreading portal framed of hammered gold,
 With mystic emblems quaintly wrought thereon,
 'Mid strange devices curiously excelled,
 And as the chorus ends, the throng beheld
 The first faint flushes of the dawn appear,
 And see the gleaming doors rounder rolled
 By unseen agency, while loud and clear
 Strains weirdly sweet echo each listening ear.

Within they saw the Arch-Emmanuel stand
 Alone in majesty, his form arrayed
 In radiant robes of purple; in his hand
 The silver-rod of scepter softly swayed,

His swarthy locks upon his shoulders strayed,
 Beneath a zone of blood-red rubies, strung
 On dainty golden chains ; his neck displayed
 A woven serpent that around it hung,
 From whose broad head a sun-like pendant hung.

Beside the chief a brazen tripod stood,
 From which arose in flame the sacred fire,
 Perfumed with fragrant myrrh and sandalwood.
 The sistrum tinkles ; ere those sounds expire,
 The brides, escorted, as their rites require,
 By priestly hands are to the temple led
 To wait in silence till the gods inspire
 The ruler's words ; at length he bowed his head,
 And turning eastward, reverently said :

" Oh, thou all-potent source of life and heat !
 Our dearest and our best we yield to thee
 To make our mystic union more complete,
 That this dependent earth may closely be
 Linked by love's ties to its bright deity.
 Thus every year, three blushing brides we bring
 To grace thy couch, as Deval's rites decree,
 That thou thy glorious smiles o'er earth may fling,
 And triple harvests from our valleys spring."

He blessed the brides, whilst priest and people fell
 Prone on their knees, until the blessing done,
 Roused by the sounds as of a silver bell,
 The tongues of all assembled shout as one,

"Hail to the brides of our great lord, the sun !"
Then spake the great high priest, "My sons, ye know
Of these three brides, the people's chosen one
Must hymn the god—proclaim your choice," and lo,
A mighty shout arose for Adimo.

The priests who brought the singer from the cot
With lusty voices to that choice demur,
For still within their bosoms, unforget,
Rankles the song that did administer,
Such subtle fancies, and so strangely stir
The spearmen ; but the dame, the court within,
Inches the crowd her daughter to prefer
Until the ruling priest, to stay the din,
Bids Adimo the festal song begin.

"Bright spirit that, in the beginning,
Ere Time and its measureless sea
Were ruffled by currents of sinning,
Or shadowed by sorrows to be,
Called Beauty and Life from Disorder,
That Thy will in the voids should be done,
And gave each creation its border ;
Oh, mystical sun !

"Bright being, triune and supernal,
From whom all creation had birth,
Yet wept, from thy dwellings eternal,
O'er the sins and the sorrows of earth,

*And the world from its errors to purge, in
The likeness and form of a child,
Disdained not the womb of a virgin,
A maid undefiled.*

*"The light that all others transcended,
In pity and love laid aside,
The god with humanity blended,
Content as a man to abide,
That regions dereshadowed by sorrow
To glories of joy might be won,
And Death be the gate of Life's morrow
Oh, mystical sun!*

*"Oh, love, past conception of mortals,
That died for our sins on the tree,
And shattered the bars of Death's portals,
That men from its gloom might be free;
Though our sins be as seventy times seven,
On the steps of His cross we may rise,
Till our feet tread the pathway to heaven
And thrones in the skies.*

*Oh, light, from the grave newly risen,
Extending to all men the key
That opens the gates of Earth's prison,
Still guiding us onward to thee,*

*Go, moved to fresh life by thy story,
Stirred the pitfalls of evil to shun,
We may hasten to share in thy glory,
Oh, mystical sun !*

*Save for his fears that the excited throng
Might murmur at an insult paid the bride,
The Arch-Atharvan would have stayed the song ;
Yet his resentment can he scarcely hide,
And turning to the priests who stood beside,
He fiercely said, "Our fears were just, for lo,
'This maiden's words our sacred rites deride ;
Wise was our choice ; 'tis well that she should go
To join the silent in the shades below."*

*But as the singer ceased, a mighty shout
Rang through the courtyard ; people, spearmen,
all,
Except the priests who stand the steps about,
Stirred by the song, in homage prostrate fall,
And on the sweet-voiced maiden loudly call,
"Songstress divine, Ahura's white-robed dove,
Would that our prayers the mandate might recall,
Or cause thy tarrying from the joys above,
To teach our hearts this mystery of love."*

*Loth called the priests for silence, but in vain ;
The wild excitement all their skill defies,*

And whilst they strove the tumult to restrain,
Unmarked by all, the sun began to rise
Above the hills that fringe the eastern skies,
Until the chieftain, lifting up his head,
Beholds the glorious orb, and quickly cries,
"The bridegroom cometh ; let the brides be led
Behind the tripod till our prayers be said."

At his command, three paces to the rear
The brides are taken, but the ruler's prayers,
'Mid that confusion scarcely reach the ear
Of those that stand upon the marble stairs.
Meanwhile a servant of the shrine repairs
To a recess within the temple walls,
And all in order for the rite prepares ;
The-loosened cord the last "Amen" forestalls ;
Before the brides a golden curtain falls.

Then on that veil a radiant glory shone,
As though the morned and concentrated rays
Of the bright deity were cast thereon
To set the gleaming texture all ablaze.
The throng is stilled, and on the mystery gaze
With eyes by wonder fixed and heart astatic.
Whilst yet upon the woof the lustre plays,
And priest and people for its fading wait,
The Christian champions pass the silver gate.

First rode their guide upon a charger white,
The silver star still gleaming on her breast,

And close behind, in armour flashing bright,
With visors raised and lances laid in rest,
Sir Percival and his companions pressed ;
The saintly father at their back displayed
The golden cross upon his snowy vest ;
Next, half the squires in glittering steel arrayed,
The others rearward with the ladies stayed.

But wonder filled the people when they saw
The star-decked maiden in such fashion ride,
For those who knew her, stirred with sudden awe,
In wild amazement to their neighbours cried,
“Our prayers are answered ; lo, the sweet-voiced bride
Comes from the margin of the golden shore.
The bells and nuptial garments laid aside,
She mingles with the mortal world once more
To stir our heart strings with her rosy lore.”

Despite the priests, in honour to the maid,
Spearmen and populace alike make way ;
The knights advance nor is their march delayed
Until against the temple steps they stay.
Then Percival, “ Ye proud Atharvans, say
What purpose bare this curtain covers o’er.
Where are the brides that graced your rites to
day ?
For one of those we seek ; that one restore,
So may we vex this festal scene no more.”

But as he speaks the sounds of strife arise
Behind the screen, and through a secret door,
The Arch-Atharvan with some followers flies,
And Eglantine, who scarce with patience bore
His comrade's parley, could restrain no more
His zeal ; dismounting, up the stairway flew,
Then with his falchion in the veil he tore
A mighty rent ; the fabric cleft in two
No longer hid the inner space from view.

Meanwhile, the moment that the veil disspread,
A panel opened in the wall behind,
And through the space the pre-destined maids were led
By three tall priests, who walk with heads inclined
Down a dark passageway that seems to wind
Around the centre walls, but Adimo,
Seeking some latent mystery to find,
Goes first with mind intent and eyes aglow,
Whose searching flashes wander to and fro.

Silent they move, and soon it seems to him
That sounds of stillance assail his ear,
A hissing murmur, rising faint and dim ;
Again the sound is heard, now grown more clear,
And as his escort, falling to the rear,
Unclops his hand, his piercing glances fell
Upon a dim-reen pit that lies a-near,
Across whose bottom writhing shadows crawl ;
Then he steps back against the nearest wall.

The priest behind with sudden dash intended
 To throw him forward, but he watches well,
 And nimbly slipped aside when foot extended,
 For which the Kitharvan stumbled—traveller—fell
 Down to the depths of that infernal hell;
 But he who followed next his buckskin mail
 Across the margin was able to spring,
 Ere Adim, with wondrous strength arrayed,
 Hurled him also downward through the shade.

The other bride had fallen screaming down,
 And her attendant, with a gleaming knife,
 Hidden before beneath his burning gown,
 Leaps forward, every pulse with passion rife,
 And from the rear assails the singer's life,
 With vicious thrust the sinister shade below,
 Seeking with one fell stab to end the strife.
 Yet, through the singer's feet beneath the blow,
 He turned and sprang upon the treacherous foe.

Fierce was the struggle, yet, by God inspired,
 Adim clutched his foe's throat until
 The fierce Kitharvan, faint, his strength cut brief,
 Gave a great choking gasp and then lay still,
 While the rejoicing singer at his will
 His limbs with his own girdle firmly bound.

Then stirred the priest with supplication shrill,
 "Hush me not living to that loathsome ground
 Where adders hiss and venomous snakes abound!"

And bidding, unhesitating, raised the shield,
 "This will be proof to me the passage true;
 Though slain with none of these, he yet conveyed
 To last his glory in the sacred dust.
 He marches on, and soon, his journey o'er,
 Reaching the point whence you yet are,
 And, loaded with the burden that he bore,
 Meets in the inner hall who waits, who has
 His further progress with drawn promise.

He laid the burden down, but not before
 One well-directed stroke had reached his chest;
 The steel turned its edge, yet crimson wine
 Saturated softly down the snowy bridal veil;
 Then to the wife his will and strength addressed,
 With hand and eye his brethren pressing hard,
 Charging their onward route, though severely blessed,
 So fast he moves, that the hurried guard
 Can further aid his progress or retard.

'Twas then the Arch-bishop heard the din,
 And with his followers to the point flew,
 Who, armed with gleaming knives, came pouring in,
 Followed by Magistrate, who, hurrying through
 The curtain severed by his sword in two,
 Reached to the scene; a short time soon
 And their companions, with bright weapons bent
 A speedy passage through the priestly train,
 Whose weapons on their armor strike in vain.

The people in the courtyard, all amazed,
 Seeing the priests with murderous rage pursue,
 Two sacred brides, sword still and mutely gazed,
 While those two haggard fathers, hurrying through
 The throng, together to the temple flew,
 Where one dear child, at least, in peril lies,
 And then the stricken singer strives again
 To gain his seat, but selfishness denies
 Till Euphrosine assists him to arise.

And then he speaks, "Oh, people, ye who love
 Your daughters, destined as ye think to dwell
 On shining thrones in some bright land above;
 Sad is the truth! These demon priests impel
 Their fragile bodies down a gulf of hell,
 Where venomous snakes their dainty forms devour.
 Blind eyes! blind hearts! when such dark rites
 Compel
 To yield your tender lambs to ravening power,
 While ye are glorying in the golden hour.

"Awake, arise! By those all-passing songs
 Of love maternal, striking deep its root!
 Suffered for what? That those envenomed songs
 May glutton on the world's most precious fruit.
 And ye, O sires, do not fondly treasure those
 Before your beams of the garish day
 When curling locks, soft hand or tiny foot
 Upon your knees in sweet contentment lay,
 Or round the father romped in joyous play?

Kling all the rills of those fatherless dead,
 And cease the shade of that all-showering tree,
 'The spirit of Love, whose generous spirit said,
 "Fading the little ones to come to me,
 And Heaven with childlike hearts shall be
 Thing to the hand that was this yet made
 For all might yours in Love's pure mystery"
 He came, and leaning on his brother's side,
 His head was bowed with life's shining tide,

Stirred by his words, those youthful ones within
 Exclaim, "where is this trembling, rich-fathered creature?"
 With sudden strength they snatched his arm in vain;
 His weakness behind, by fear determined,
 The dagger-like words upon his body shivered,
 While through the heart a mighty wound uprose
 From hearts where Justice lingered yet unbroken,
 "Down with the priests! Let Truth our eyes illumine,
 And Freedom's banner show their shining way!"

Then cried the fathers, "Bind them tight in bonds,
 And drag them down into the dark recess,
 There hold them handlong through the shadowy dim,
 That they may taste the venereal bitterness,
 And struggle while the fiend within them preys!"
 With shouts of rage, the wretched people run,
 Raised into action by their fierce address,
 To seize the cowering priests, and burning men,
 They bring them to the serpents, one by one.

A little way below the marble stair
The lady Joan and her dark-eyed maiden stayed,
And as they fingered, wrapt in silent prayer,
The singing boys, with many a bright-eyed maid
In joyous garments for the feast arrayed,
Press'd round them, asking when the sweet-voiced bride
And what the teachings by her wing conveyed.
Fain would they hear of Love. The saint replied,
And taught them of the Godhead crucified.

Meanwhile Geraint, assisted by Gawain,
The open panel from its hinges tore,
And near the corpse, where knelt in silent pain
Their brother knights with eyelids streaming o'er,
Laid down their burden on the blood-stained floor;
They draped the bier with shimmering cloth of state,
And then the mourning knights the lady bore
In solemn silence to the silver gate
Where the White Lady and the sisters wait.

The tender Core fell as full the dead,
Gripped with grief, her sisters, sobbing low,
Gazed on his face, but the White Lady said,
"His cure is certain; surely God knows best.
Over the troubled deeps to shores of rest
His soul hath ventured." Then, at her command,
They turned their steps toward the distant West,
And bore him, followed by a mighty band,
Unto the further gate of Fairyland.

KATYERKATY

*Hence the spreading mists the sun hath set
 And twilight reigns upon the silent sea;
 But still we drift with all our canvas set
 On to those dim seen shores of mystery,
 Whose hills conceal the paths of Time to be,
 For one bright beacon shines, illumed for all,
 Marking the haven that we long to see,
 And though across our stars the shadows fall,
 Yet Love remains the greatest thing of all*

